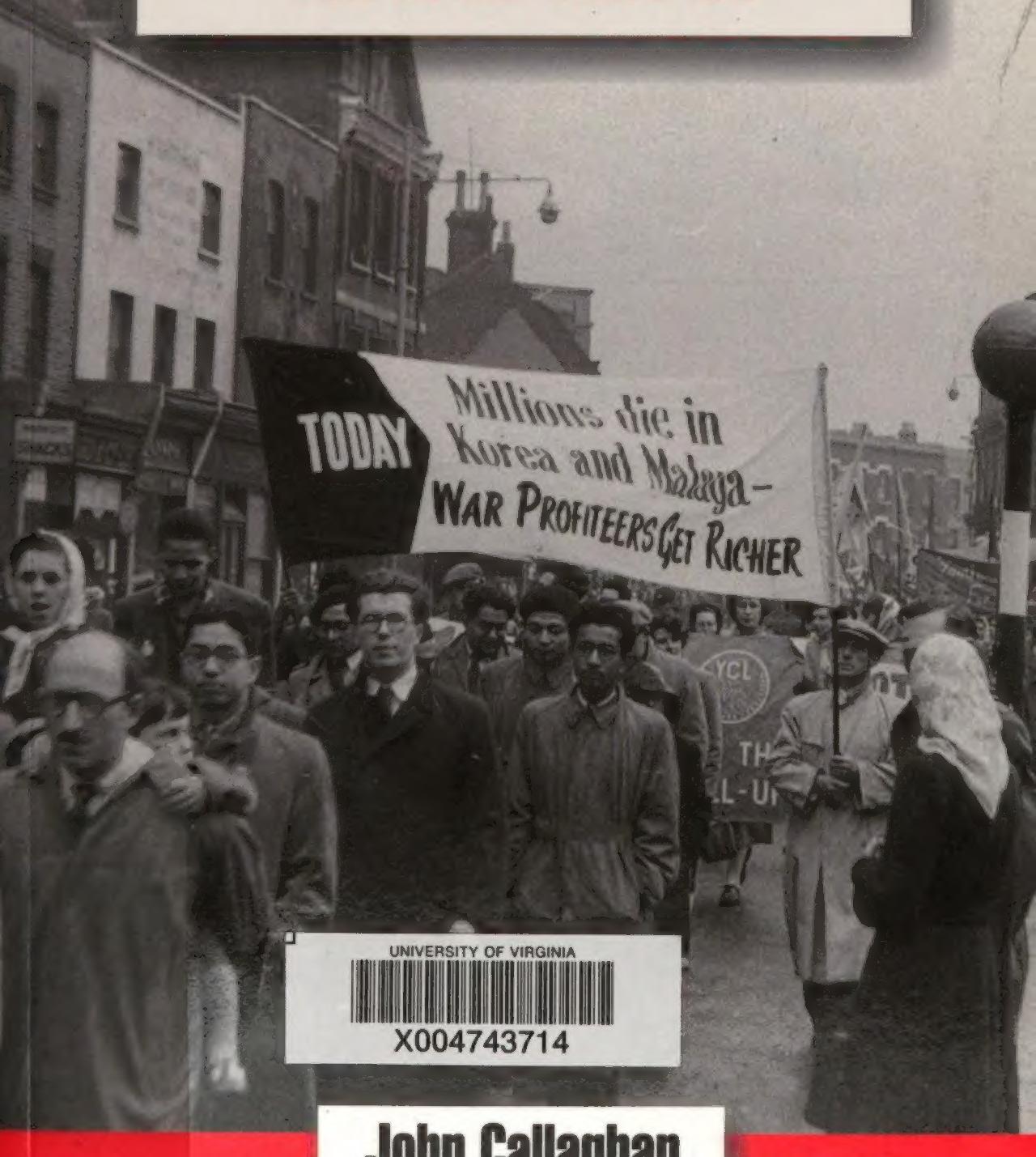


# COLD WAR, CRISIS AND CONFLICT

## THE CPGB 1951-68



UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA



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John Callahan



# **Cold War, Crisis and Conflict:**

## *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1951-68*

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# Preface and Acknowledgements

A meeting to consider how a history of the Communist Party of Great Britain might be written by its own experts was convened as long ago as 28 August 1956 by Frank Jackson, a Party full-timer working in the library at its King Street headquarters in Covent Garden. By September the Executive Committee had agreed 'to proceed with the preparations for the publication of a history of the Party'. An Editing Commission was appointed consisting of Harry Pollitt, Robin Page Arnot, Emile Burns, Hymie Fagan, Eric Hobsbawm, Allen Hutt, Frank Jackson, James Klugmann, A. L. Morton, Brian Pearce, Andrew Rothstein, and Bob Stewart. Willie Gallacher, Wal Hannington, Albert Inkpin, Bill Joss, William Paul and Dona Torr were invited to become corresponding members of the Commission. Chimen Abramsky joined at a later date and on 10 December 1956 the first meeting took place. R. Palme Dutt was a notable absentee. The Party's leading ideologist perhaps understood that nothing worthwhile could come from such a venture at that time.

Work on the history of the Communist Party was nevertheless begun and the first two volumes, covering the period 1919 to 1926, were written by James Klugmann and published in 1968 and 1969. Noreen Branson added two more volumes in 1985 and 1998. Over forty years had elapsed since Frank Jackson's inaugural meeting by the time Branson's second volume of history was published and this study, like its predecessor, was much more critical than those written by Klugmann. This volume, the fifth in the sequence, is different again. The Communist Party and the Soviet Union no longer exist. The archives are open and former Party members are more ready to speak and write about the organisation and their role within it than was ever possible in the years before the Soviet Union's implosion. I have also benefited immensely, as my predecessors could not, from the recent work of other historians of British Communism who provide much of the insight which informs the present work. I will not name them here but my references should make clear where these intellectual debts reside.

The reader will see that I have adopted an analytical and thematic approach rather than a chronological narrative. The book covers just 17

years, the periodisation being determined by the point at which the previous volume ended and the idea that 1968 represents a turning point because of the appearance of a new radicalism in the year, which began to affect the Party soon afterwards. In 1951 the Party adopted a new programme – *The British Road to Socialism*; in 1968 it criticised the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. But the years in between cannot be seen as a concerted, conscious attempt to wrest the Party from its long dependency on the Soviet Union. There was no search for ‘Britishness’ in that sense, though there were Party members who believed that it could and should become more relevant to British politics. Many of these members made themselves known during the course of 1956, when the Party was convulsed by Nikita Khruschev’s criticism of Stalin’s malign personal dictatorship. But prior to that date there had been no public suggestion from the British party that anything was amiss in the Soviet Union.

On the contrary, when the Party adopted its new programme in 1951, it was already deeply immersed in the latest shrill campaign to defend the Soviet Union from its enemies. It was the Cold War that inaugurated this phase of Communist history, marked in October 1947 by the formation of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform). This was an organisation which orchestrated much of the propaganda work of the British Communists at the beginning of the period under analysis here, even though they never formally belonged to it. By the time of Stalin’s death in March 1953, the Cominform-inspired campaign against American imperialism had already lost its momentum in the British party, as it had elsewhere, but it was not until 1956 that the Cominform was formally dissolved.

The Party’s Soviet ‘ecology’ is the first thing I deal with in this book, after an opening chapter intended to provide an overview of the organisation and its doctrines and ethos. Between 1951 and 1956 the gap between the Party’s publicly professed view of the Soviet Union and that of nearly everyone else in Britain grew. I examine the nature of this Communist dependency on the Soviet myth, up to and including the turmoil of 1956, in Chapter Two, as an indispensable guide to what follows. Chapter Three begins with the colonial struggle launched by the Cominform and follows the subsequent changes in the Party’s battles on this front into the 1960s. Chapters Four and Five are also concerned with areas of work which supply us with a broad conceptualising framework – those of the Party’s international and economic analyses, and the perspectives for class struggle which they were expected to supply. I then move on to consider the Party’s political and industrial work by examining its attempts to refine and apply its programme and establish a working relationship with the Labour Party and trade unions fit for this purpose. The last two chapters consider the impediments and forces for change in the Party as it attempted to come to terms with the 1960s.

I have tried as far as possible to use the voices of Party activists as well as the Party archive in writing this book. Many former Party members have given me the benefit of their experience within the organisation. My research assistant, Jean Jones, interviewed many more and without her efforts on my behalf both the volume and quality of research undertaken would have suffered. Numerous libraries were visited in the course of this work and I particularly want to thank the staff at the Working Class Movement library in Salford and the staff at the University of Wolverhampton library. I would also like to thank Stephen Bird and Janette Martin of the Labour History Archive and Study Centre in Manchester for their assistance in accessing the Communist archive which is housed there. Thanks are also due to Monty Johnstone for reading and correcting the text but as always on these occasions it is only necessary to add that I alone am responsible for the final version.

# 1. Anatomy

## THE VANGUARD PARTY

Collectivist principles were dominant in the 1950s in every department of national life, from the rising number of trade unionists to the steady growth of state expenditure on public housing, the national health service and the social services. Standardisation and uniformity characterised many of these provisions. The political parties talked of planning and managing the economy. It was an age of confidence in science and technology and material progress. Indeed people talked as if progress was measured by economic growth and technological advance. The Communist Party belonged to the 'camp of socialism and peace' but it was both in and of this larger world of the 1950s, while possessing a number of dominating characteristics which set it apart. The most important of these was its claim to be a Marxist-Leninist vanguard. The Party's doctrine and ethos were the products of over twenty years of formal and willing subordination to the Soviet Union and the Communist International. When the Communist International was dissolved in 1943 the habits, attitudes and beliefs nurtured since 1920 survived intact. Chief among these was confidence in the leadership of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.<sup>1</sup> The Party's commitment to the doctrines of Marxism-Leninism, which were supposed to give it a special capacity for political leadership, had been developed under the tutelage of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The Party's self-image, derived from these doctrines and the official histories of Bolshevism, was that of a 'fighting' cadre organisation. Its leadership role derived from the science of Marxism-Leninism but only when doctrine was made efficient by the discipline and organisation of the membership, operating according to the principles of democratic centralism. Complete unity in action was required of every member once decisions had been made. Every unit of the organisation accordingly took its lead from those higher in the Party hierarchy and provided it to those lower down. This was inevitably an idealised version of how the Party actually operated, but the point of significance is how very close the reality conformed to the ideal.

A survey conducted on the fortieth anniversary of the Party in 1960 revealed that 188 foundation members were still active in the organisation.<sup>2</sup> For real continuity, however, one would have had to look at the tightly-knit leadership. The summit of the organisation, the Political Committee, consisted at the beginning of our period, of Harry Pollitt (General Secretary), Rajani Palme Dutt (Vice-Chair, head of the International Department, editor of *Labour Monthly*), Peter Kerrigan (Industrial Organiser), J. R. Campbell (editor of the *Daily Worker*), George Matthews (Assistant General Secretary), Phil Piratin (MP for Stepney, 1945-50), William Lauchlan, Mick Bennett (head of the Organisation Department), Nora Jeffrey (Women's Organiser), John Gollan (assistant editor *Daily Worker*), Emile Burns, John Mahon, James Klugmann (head of Education), and Syd Abbott. Dutt, Pollitt, Campbell, Burns, the Party Chairman William Gallacher and a number of other foundation members had held prominent positions in the organisation since the 1920s.<sup>3</sup> They continued to do so throughout the 1950s and not until the middle of the next decade could it be said that the leadership had passed to another generation.

Such continuity testified to the cohesion of this leading group as well as to its insulation from the vagaries of democracy. The Political Committee was elected by an Executive Committee, on which all the members of the Political Committee sat. Most members of this larger national leadership had themselves chalked up many years of Party membership. They were bound together by a common ideology, shared experiences, shared hardships – most of them had been imprisoned for political activities at one time or another – friendship and a common alienation from the Labour Party. They did not always see eye to eye, of course; Dutt's factionalism and opportunism, for example, inspired the 'disgust' of his colleagues on more than one occasion<sup>4</sup> and sour relations between full-timers were not unheard of. Indeed the full-timers in the North West district were at loggerheads for years and seriously disrupted the work of the Party in 1958-1960.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless the leadership had avoided the sort of strife that had divided Communist Parties on the continent and high-ranking defectors and renegades were rare and isolated figures. The Communist International's decisive interventions into Party life in the 1920s had helped to establish the credentials of the men at the top without splitting the organisation or making internal enemies for them.

From 1929 until 1943 the Executive Committee had been elected by the Party congress by the method of a 'recommended list', nominally drawn up by a 'panels commission' at congress. A modified version of this system was in operation for nearly all of the period covered by this book. George Thomson, a long-standing member of the Executive, explained how the system really worked in evidence submitted to a Party commission in 1956. The recommended list for the new Executive, he pointed out, was actually prepared by the Political

Committee and then presented for the approval of the existing Executive before making its way to the party congress via the panels commission. According to Thomson, the Political Committee would take evidence and recommendations from the Executive but would deal with any objections as it saw fit after only 'perfunctory' discussion by the Executive itself. His conclusion was that the Executive exercised little real control over the composition of the recommended list.<sup>6</sup> Delegates to the Party's biannual congress were required to approve or reject this list in its entirety. Since it invariably consisted largely of existing members of the Executive, the EC's self-perpetuation seemed to be guaranteed by the system.

The panel system was suspended during the war and replaced by open voting, but the Party's 'big names' and current heroes continued to dominate, possibly at the expense of rising talent unknown beyond its region of origin. The Executive was forced to co-opt such members to ensure regional balance and the sort of representation that it desired the leadership to have – of full-timers, trade union officials, women, industrial workers, district and area representatives and so on. In 1952 the Party reverted to the panel system, electing the EC *en bloc*. In 1954 this was modified again by allowing a ballot of congress delegates for each of the candidates named on the recommended list. Throughout these modifications the Executive continued to be dominated by national and district full-timers and trade union officials, and the grip of the Party leadership on the life of the organisation was undisturbed. Of the 42 members of the Executive in 1956, for example, 14 were national full-timers, seven were district full-timers, five were trade union officials, a further fourteen members were industrial or professional workers (six of them in engineering) and just two were classified as housewives.

Clearly there was more than organisational manipulation behind the stability of the leadership. The national leaders first came to prominence because of their energy, dedication and understanding of what was required of them in the stormy inter-war years – the period when Stalin consolidated his power within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Until 1943 the Comintern acted as the medium through which the leaders of the Communist movement (increasingly the Russian leaders) could constitutionally interfere in the life of a national party. These powers included the power to change the leadership.<sup>7</sup> Dutt and Pollitt were beneficiaries of such interventions in 1929. The top-down command structure reflected the political purposes of the Comintern and its national sections, which was to prepare for a violent overthrow of capitalism. The 'Bolshevization' of the Communist Parties in the 1920s brought them firmly under the control of the international leadership (the leaders of the CPSU). The militaristic organisation and ethos of the Communist Party was also kept alive by the conditions of its existence; and though these varied from country to

country, the experience of sectarian militancy in the Depression years, the fight against fascism and, finally, the Cold War were common to them all. Even in 1951, for example, Districts were reporting on a recent 'Vigilance' campaign to tighten security and the Party was inclined to stress the need for greater 'revolutionary vigilance' than currently pertained (which included 'checks on doubtful elements', obtaining 'biographies' from members and other measures of this sort).<sup>8</sup>

Party organisation reflected the huge ambitions of the Communists since the origins of the movement – the construction of a mass, vanguard party and the capture of state power. The Party was divided into 18 Districts – 16 in England – varying in size from London and Lancashire with their large urban populations to Devon and Cornwall and East Anglia at the other extreme. Scotland and Wales each counted as Districts but, like the more populous Districts in England, were subdivided into Areas. Districts held biennial congresses which elected the District Committee, the body responsible for implementing policy as determined by the Executive. Each District had a full-time secretary and a ruling secretariat that was the equivalent locally of the Political Committee. If the membership and finances of the District justified it, additional full-timers worked in the Districts with responsibility for industrial work, education and propaganda and the *Daily Worker*.

This organisational paraphernalia was replicated at Area level in those Districts which were further subdivided. Area Committees came under the jurisdiction of the District Committee which was empowered to set them up and determine how they functioned. Scotland was subdivided into 12 such Areas; London had 7; Lancashire 3 – Manchester, Merseyside, and East Lancashire; Yorkshire had 5; the Midlands 4; the East Midlands had 3 Areas – the Coalfield being one of them, while Leicester and Nottingham were the other two; Wales had 7 Areas, averaging fewer than 200 members each. At two-yearly intervals representatives of all the branches concerned were required to elect an Area Committee at a statutory conference. The Area Committee would then assume responsibility for co-ordinating and initiating activities with a local dimension – including electoral work – as well as building the Party branches.

National Congress was based upon delegates from each District Committee as well as direct branch representation, but Area Committees were only allowed consultative delegates at District Congresses. The national congress met on a biennial basis and was supposed to make Party policy. But the agenda and the congress debates which flowed from it were overwhelmingly set by the leadership and the Political Report it placed before the delegates. There were those in the Party who – in the words of Les Cannon, speaking at the 22nd congress in 1952 – were 'not enamoured by the democratic constitution of our Party' but the vast majority of members probably agreed with the same speaker when he described the Communist Party

as the 'most democratic institution in British political life'.<sup>9</sup> The whole organisation, as we have seen, was informed by the methods of democratic centralism which had been adopted at the origin of the Communist movement and many Communists took the same view as the one expressed by Cannon; when things went wrong – as in the case of the Titoite renegades in eastern Europe – it was because democratic centralism had broken down. There was nothing controversial for most members in the fact that Leninist organisational principles demanded a minimum of unity of action once a majority decision had been arrived at. But in practice democratic centralism also ruled out the formation of factions – and anything that might lead to factions such as any unauthorised publications or discussions between branches – during the period when an issue was still under discussion. Thus the debates conducted within the Party at large were dominated by the leadership and the debates and voting of leadership bodies were kept secret so that a public face of unity was maintained at all times. It was also commonly required of defeated minorities within the leadership group – though the ordinary Party member would not know that they *were* defeated minorities – that they be seen to argue and campaign enthusiastically for the position they originally opposed. Coupled with the principle that the higher bodies of the movement dominated those below them, these organisational characteristics added up to the 'Party of a new type' advocated by Lenin and justified, as Ted Bramley observed in 1957, first as a condition for success in repressive Russia under the Tsars and, after 1914, globally, on the grounds that 'an era of wars and revolutions' had arrived which required the national sections of the Communist movement to prepare for civil war.<sup>10</sup> Many members believed that military discipline was justified either in this context or in some mundane manifestation of it, such as the cold war.

But even the leaders complained that the actual operation of things was often unsatisfactory. There was not enough debate within the Executive; members were crushed by their routine Party commitments and unable to devote time to their 'high responsibilities'; there was not enough input from the branches; not enough representation of the Party's industrial cadre; not enough discussion of the Parties of eastern Europe; full-timers and Political Committee members dominated Executive discussions; too many trade union officials were absent (such as Frank Haxell and Arthur Horner) for one reason or another or played no part in discussion when they were present; other comrades were politically deficient and needed assistance.<sup>11</sup> An even greater list of complaints was directed against the ordinary membership.

## EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Communists were conscious of themselves as members of a world party. It was a source of pride and strength that they had comrades with exactly the same views all over the globe. Clearly, the Party was

in origin, organisation, and ideology intimately related to the Bolshevik Revolution and the evolution of the Soviet state. Confidence in the Soviet Union's march to communism probably peaked in the 1950s. The Party believed that 'the Soviet Union now has all the conditions needed for solving its chief economic problems – to overtake and surpass the most economically developed capitalist countries as regards output per head of the population'.<sup>12</sup> But even before the Russians embarked upon the first of the Five Year Plans the British Communists had always been dependent on them in numerous ways including the most obvious – the financial. The events of 1956, however, when the Party was torn apart by a glimpse of the truth – that Soviet Russia had become a monstrous dictatorship under Stalin – produced a financial crisis stemming from the huge loss of members, some of them wealthy individual donors.<sup>13</sup> The Party's financial reliance on the Russians – something it made no attempt to disguise in the 1920s<sup>14</sup> and had held in common with other Communist Parties<sup>15</sup> – was sharply underlined. It cost £55,000 – the equivalent of £1 million today – to set up the CPGB at its founding Unity Convention in 1920.<sup>16</sup> Something like £5,000 per month was required to keep it going for the next two years. In the days of the Comintern its representative in Britain in the late 1920s – Max Petrovsky (David Lipetz) – oversaw expenditure of the subsidy which was running at £54,000 in 1927, much of it consumed by staffing the Party and running its newspaper. Costs increased when the *Daily Worker* was launched in 1930, at a time when the Party had only 2,555 members.<sup>17</sup> The Party was able to raise more of its own money after 1933 as the Nazi menace grew, the membership increased and wealthy Jewish businessmen were attracted to the organisation. But when these were lost in 1956 John Gollan very quickly turned to Moscow to make up the financial shortfall. Gollan visited Russia in 1957 and from then until the 1970s the CPGB received about £100,000 per year via the Embassy in London.<sup>18</sup>

The Party's financial dependence on the Soviet state could do nothing to enhance its independence of mind. Finlay Hart sharply reminded dissidents on the Executive in 1956 that allowing criticism of Russia to be printed in the *Daily Worker* would cost the Party money. He was thinking of lost subscriptions in fact, but it was also true of the 'Moscow Gold' that might be jeopardised by an unprecedented turn of the sort Hart alluded to.<sup>19</sup> The truth, however, was that Communist devotion to the Soviet state did not depend on its subventions. Unwavering support for the Bolsheviks had been a condition of membership of the Communist International in 1919 and much of that organisation's efforts were devoted, as we have seen, to the task of 'Bolshevising' the Communist Parties, part of which process involved the inculcation of the habits of discipline and subordination appropriate to an army. The principle of Soviet leadership survived innumerable twists and turns of policy – many of them damaging to the British

Party – and by 1943 so ingrained had it become that the Communist International could be dissolved without weakening the link. The Soviet-centric universe of the Communist Parties seemed unchanged even after the People's Democracies and the People's Republic of China came into existence and was successfully put to the test in the late 1940s when the campaign against 'Titoites' in eastern Europe was waged, as we shall see in the next chapter. Soviet prestige in the 1940s benefited enormously, of course, from the Red Army's destruction of the Nazis. In the 1950s the unequalled status of the USSR in the Communist world was also sustained by the perception that socialism was technologically and economically dynamic in that country, while imperialism, its sworn enemy, was in the process of visible disintegration. Metropolitan capitalism would eventually be squeezed to death by this twin process, the Communists confidently believed. The Khruschev revelations rocked the Communist world as we shall see, but this did little to change the British Party's public attachment to Moscow in the immediate aftermath. In 1958 the Executive, in illustration of the fact, timidly advised against sending a representative to the 7th congress of the Yugoslav League of Communists because the errant Yugoslavs had analysed the 'world problem' in terms of polarised power blocs, rather than antagonistic social systems as approved by the Russians.

We will see that the Party leadership's self-policing kept it loyal to the Russian view of things on many subsequent occasions. It also continued to turn to the Soviet Communist Party for advice. A fading legacy of the Comintern period was the British Party's responsibility for assisting Communist Parties in the British colonies and former colonies. Dutt, head of the International Department, continued to intervene in the affairs of the often fractious leadership of the Communist Party of India and occasionally pleaded for an authoritative Soviet statement to support his stance.<sup>20</sup> This 'normally impermissible' step, as he called it in 1956, was also prompted by a concern that the British Communists were increasingly called upon to adjudicate between competing factions and groups of foreign Communists on matters on which it lacked authority and expertise. Dutt specifically referred to quarrels between Communists in Iraq, Egypt, and Burma and between rival claimants to the title in Nigeria. All of these had been brought to the attention of the International Department by the groups concerned. The British Party leadership actually requested 'some normal practice of contact' between the International Department and a corresponding section of the CPSU. The French Communists enjoyed such a regular channel but though there was 'much coming and going' of foreign Communists through London, according to Dutt's statement, the British Party lacked the means 'by which we can share this information'. The Russians, it would seem, found little use for the British Communists, compared to

the French, and there is no evidence that they responded to Dutt's plea for help. The real point of the episode is its illustration of the continuing need of the British Communists for assistance from Moscow.

### **ADVISORY SUB-COMMITTEES**

Party headquarters at King Street was divided into departments – Organisation, International, Propaganda, Education, Women and Industrial. The Executive also drew upon the expertise of a number of national committees whose precise nature varied according to requirements. Most of these national committees were responsible to one of eight sub-committees of the Executive concerned, respectively, with Women, Youth, Culture, Economics, Social Services, Science and Technology, Health and International Affairs. Occasionally a committee was made directly responsible to the Political Committee. For example it was decided in 1950 that the time was right for organising university staff in a national university staffs committee (NUSC) and this reported directly to the PC at two-yearly intervals. The year of inception suggests that the initiative was connected with the Party's contemporary cultural struggle and the Cold War, though why the national staffs committee was required to report directly to the PC remains a mystery.<sup>21</sup> More typical was the International Affairs Committee (IAC), whose work is considered in more detail in chapter four. It consisted of 34 individuals (3 EC members included) after the shake-out of members caused by the 1956 upheaval. Among its leading lights were Claudia Jones, Kay Beauchamp, Bill Carritt, Desmond Greaves, R. Chandisingh, Pat Devine, H. B. Lim, Ivor Montagu, George Rudé, and Barbara Ruhemann. Dutt chaired the IAC and a Working Committee which met between its sessions, also comprising Idris Cox, Desmond Buckle, George Hardy, Chimen Abramsky and Hugo Rathbone. This body dealt with current questions and prepared the agenda for meetings of the IAC. The IAC also utilised seven advisory sub-committees in 1957-8 (their number and focus varied a little over the period) concerned respectively with the Middle East, Africa, Asia, the West Indies, Irish issues, Jewish issues, and the United States.

Most of the other national groups and committees were linked in some way to the sub-committees of the Executive. Thus a national student advisory committee reported to the Youth Advisory Committee, while the national cultural committee – whose brief was to consider ideological questions in the arts and sciences – received reports and briefings from a Psychologists Group, an Artists Group, a Film Group, Music Group, Theatre Group, Writers Group, and Linguists Group. The Historians Group was expected to advise the Propaganda Department, provide historical information and conduct historical research. The Journalists Group was responsible to the Industrial Department, as were the Architects. These committees and groups were staffed by some very able intellectuals. For example, Maurice Dobb,

Ronald Meek, Henry Collins, William Hutton, John Eaton, Ron Bellamy (Economics); John Saville, Edward Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, George Rudé, A. L. Morton, Christopher Hill, Victor Kiernan, Jim Fyrth, Brian Pearce, George Thomson, and Rodney Hilton (History); and Margot Heineman, Bill Warren, Brian Simon, Alan Bush, Jack Lindsey, John Berger, Alick West, Maurice Cornforth, J. D. Bernal, Hyman Levy and Max Morris in various areas of culture and science. None of these would have claimed to be any more talented and energetic than Party cadre of the calibre of Sam Aaronovitch, Kay Beauchamp, Solly Kaye, Bert Ramelson, Bill Moore and Bill Alexander. In specific areas of industry the organisation could also draw upon another range of organisers and intellectuals such as (in mining) Lawrence Daly, Mick McGahey, Abe and Alex Moffatt, Arthur Horner, Jock Kane, Frank Watters and Will Paynter. Similar talent was available in engineering and there was plenty of ability among the Party's trade union officials. Party educational schools that were concerned to develop the cadre drew on this personnel. In many ways the Communist Party in Britain was an organisation of socialist intellectuals, some in the universities but far more of them in engineering.

## CADRE

'Cadre' is an ambiguous term in Communist usage. Since Communist Parties were sometimes referred to as cadre parties, the implication was that the entire membership could be so designated. The Parties themselves preferred to see it that way and there is no doubt that the goal was an active and ideologically sophisticated membership. By comparison with, say, Labour Party membership, the goal was generally reached, though not always and often with a heavy price attached in terms of membership turnover. But the Party also referred to its full-timers as 'the cadre' and on this basis the District cadre consisted of 72 people in 1957, distributed regionally in proportion to Party membership. Thus the four biggest concentrations of full-timers were in London (16), Scotland (12), Lancashire (7) and Yorkshire (7). Since the London figure excludes Party full-timers attached to headquarters at King Street, not to mention full-time, unpaid volunteers at King Street and in the Districts, employees of the *Daily Worker* and full-time trade union officials who were able to devote a considerable amount of their time to Party work, the Party was able to call on the full-time services of well over one hundred people. At its peak in 1951 the Labour Party employed about 296 full-time professional staff.<sup>22</sup> In terms of the ratio of full-timers to ordinary members the CP was streets ahead. Frank Watters, who joined the roll of full-timers in 1953, when he gave up his job in mining recalled that 'it meant at least a fifty per cent reduction in income', always supposing 'you were lucky enough to get the pittance a full-time worker was supposed to receive', which was evidently not always the case.<sup>23</sup> Communist full-timers, unlike their Labour coun-

terparts, gave much more of their time, sometimes the whole of it, to trade union and industrial work. For example of the seven Yorkshire full-timers mentioned above this was true of Bert Ramelson, Frank Watters, Frank Swift, Howard Hill, and Bill Moore.

Within the Party 'cadre work' referred to the process of developing the more active, longer established members. The Party constantly worried about the quality of its cadre. A survey conducted in 1950-51 concluded that in some Districts the most active 20-30 comrades were 'so overloaded that political study and in some cases Party work goes by the board'.<sup>24</sup> Yet political understanding was the basis for organisational ability in the Party's view. This was one of the reasons why building the industrial cadre was so difficult – such activists often preferred to submerge themselves in trade union business and forget about their politics. An analysis of 'Cadres Policy' in 1956 started with the statement 'A Communist party is an organisation of "professional revolutionaries", that is people trained to lead large numbers of people on the basis of their ability to understand a given situation and make appropriate judgements'.<sup>25</sup> It was not a definition Lenin would have recognised but it contained enough of the Leninist rhetoric to suggest otherwise. District Committees were required to make sure that branch secretaries were given the appropriate training and big surveys were conducted at intervals (1947, 1951, 1953, 1956 and 1964) to make sure that they were competent and active. Residential and day schools were organised annually around the theme of methods of leadership and both the Organisation and Education Departments were expected to follow up national schools to see how the students had progressed six months and twelve months later. In 1964 the Executive identified around 3,600 branch officers who fell into the cadre category. During the year up to September 1965, 73 schools were held involving 1,228 of these people.

Apart from such schools cadres also attended classes in the Districts to equip themselves with knowledge of specialised tasks. An effort was made to involve members in writing, speaking and tutoring activities as well as developing the skills of various branch offices (treasurer, chair, literature secretary, *Daily Worker* organiser, etc). The Communist Party was a pioneer of modern management techniques; a convinced advocate of 'multi-skilling' of the membership, the constant tweaking (management by stress, it has been called) that was supposed to improve efficiency and keep people on their toes, perpetual auditing and setting of targets, backed up by league tables and performance indicators. Only the modern business jargon was absent. But it was a firm believer in the efficacy of committees, sub-committees, reports, competition (between branches, paper sellers, etc), drives, campaigns, surveys and all the other devices intended to squeeze more from a given human resource. And it had a membership with a disproportionate amount of energy and commitment. Not all of this was utilised effectively and members were often overloaded, as noted. Kay Beauchamp,

responding to an analysis of cadres conducted in 1951, observed that much of the work done was ill-directed too. Managers – and Beauchamp was here acting as one – are of course constantly concerned to make sure that individual effort is focused and relevant. But the interest in this statement derives from her analysis of a particular form of waste – the overproduction of bulletins and publications ‘on any and every subject’ which, she believed, gave the illusion of intervention rather than the substance. In 1951 she counted 49 publications of Communist provenance in the London area alone – eight of these were industrial (such as the monthly *Power Worker*) and fully 26 had an international dimension, including a journal for each of the socialist states as well as campaigning monthlies like the *Sudan Review*, *African Bulletin*, and *Caribbean News*.<sup>26</sup> Beauchamp, an active participant in numerous internationalist campaigns herself, suggested that the publications often substituted for more meaningful interventions at public meetings, inside the unions and so on. David Kitson, forwarding the views of the Africa sub-committee of the International Department in 1952, told Pollitt that the ordinary Party member lacked the very international consciousness that these publications were intended to develop. His committee was, he said, struck by the ‘ignorance and indifference of many [members] towards colonial affairs’.<sup>27</sup> Too many publications? Not enough readers? Not enough focused activity? The real trouble was that the Party did not have the human and financial resources to do all that it took responsibility for and this – in its determination to be a national Party – it could never admit.

## MEMBERS

Official Party membership in the period 1950-68 fell from a high of 38,579 in May 1950 to a low of 24,670 recorded in February 1958. The losses incurred in the wake of the upheavals of 1956 can be estimated at 11,000, if the figures recorded for Party and YCL membership in February 1956 are compared with those for the nadir of February 1958. Membership then grew slowly each year until it reached 34,281 in February 1964. For most of the years 1951-68 it was over 30,000 strong. However, the dues-paying membership varied from as little as 79 per cent of the total in 1950, that is 30,513 members, to 87 per cent in 1955 or 28,753 members. What proportion of those in arrears finally paid their subscriptions is not clear but it is apparent that turnover of members could be very high indeed. In 1951 the Lancashire and Cheshire District reported ‘tremendous turnover’ since the end of the war.<sup>28</sup> In the year February 1963-February 1964 membership showed a net gain of 1,273 but this disguised the fact that 6,148 recruits had been made and 4,875 lost in the previous twelve months. Of the recorded total of 34,281 members, therefore, nearly 18 per cent in 1964 were new members.<sup>29</sup>

The 24th Congress in 1956 aimed for 50,000 members and a further 5,000 in the YCL as ‘the next stage’. For many years after the war the

Party leadership could not forget the spectacular growth in membership that had occurred in the first few months of 1942 when membership had grown from 22,738 to 47,932. Various campaigns were waged to build a 'mass party' after 1951 but no such spurt in growth was recorded again. Membership had begun to fall since the end of 1942. Nevertheless, the membership in 1952 – 35,124 – was still more than twice as big as that recorded on the eve of the Second World War and five times as large as the pre-Popular Front membership of 1935. Very few of the post-war members had been recruited to the Party during its revolutionary and sectarian phases in the years 1920-33. Indeed, of the 1956 membership outside of London<sup>30</sup> only 8,866 had joined the Party before 1945, clear evidence of the massive membership turnover referred to above. The figures compiled by the Organisation Department also show that recruitment was higher in the first half of the 1950s than it had been in the second half of the 1940s, ranging from as little as 691 in 1945 to just over 2,000 in 1954. Perhaps disappointment with the Labour Government played a part in increasing recruitment after 1950 but if so it was outweighed by other factors – such as the Cold War and the Party's isolation – because overall membership fell by over 6,000 in the years 1950-55. The following table shows the distribution of members by region, gender and trade union membership in the middle of the decade:

**Membership analysis for 1955**

District	M'ship	Men	Women	Men in Trade Unions	Women in Trade Unions	Housewives	Women in Industry
London	8,867	3,935	2,438	3,024	796	1,256	349
Scotland	5,629	4,102	1,507	3,387	181	1,212	234
Lancs	3,029	2,131	896	1,642	235	540	177
Yorks	2,152	1,526	634	1,232	121	456	145
Midlands	1,675	1,216	455	943	115	273	73
W. M'sex	1,375	936	439	817	99	260	38
Surrey	1,359	861	498	664	87	357	22
Wales	1,292	967	293	802	28	239	42
E. Mids	1,207	882	319	715	81	222	53
S. Essex	1,031	665	361	510	65	238	67
Kent	913	569	343	466	70	243	21
W. England	679	470	230	343	41	159	11
N. East	668	592	169	452	19	148	10
S. E. Mids	600	419	192	323	42	136	56
Sussex	416	248	168	180	37	114	42
Hants/Dorset	406	278	128	221	18	104	9
S. Mids	397	260	122	181	20	83	32
E. Anglia	317	220	97	166	24	68	1
Tee-side	287	190	98	147	14	65	7
Devon/Corn.	178	115	63	77	12	44	2
N. West	171	128	54	104	8	39	7
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>32,681</b>	<b>20,710</b>	<b>9,504</b>	<b>16,396</b>	<b>2,113</b>	<b>6,256</b>	<b>1,407</b>

The table shows that London was by far the biggest membership District, followed by Scotland, Lancashire and Yorkshire. This regional proportions changed over the time considered in this book as London's and, to a lesser extent, Scotland's share of the total declined. But there was no change in the order of size London and Scotland remained the biggest Districts by membership throughout. Women comprised just under 30 per cent of the membership – making the British Party the most feminised of them all according to J. R. Campbell<sup>31</sup> – and two-thirds of them were classified as housewives. I have found no evidence to suggest that the proportion of women members changed significantly in the period covered by this book. London and Lancashire had the highest proportions of female Party members in trade unions, while women in Wales and Scotland were distinctly under-represented in this respect. At both extremes the nature of local employment opportunities probably explain most if not all of this variation. Four-fifths of the male membership belonged to trade unions.

Residential branches of the Party nevertheless outnumbered factory branches more than 2 to 1 in 1951 and their relative importance increased over the next seventeen years so that by 1968 the 800 residential branches were five times more numerous than the factory branches. But the other trend over the period was a reduction in the total number of branches from 1,296 in 1957 to less than one thousand in 1968. The larger residential branches in Glasgow during the 1960s – at Springburn, Castlemilk, Provan, Govanhill, Pollok and Yoker – had between 119 and 199 members.<sup>32</sup> What value could be derived from such large branches was often debated, with one familiar contention being that they were congenial to passivity. Lawrence Daly estimated that the true activists were no more than 10-20 per cent of the organisation anyway, a figure consistent with the proportion of members in the London District who turned out to discuss the Executive's line on Hungary during the crisis of 1956.<sup>33</sup> A great deal of the internal work of the organisation was directed at raising levels of activity and awareness. Special schools were run to train branch secretaries and much of the Party's literature was concerned to build the skills of the membership. *How to Organise Public Meetings* (1942) is a case in point. Others in this series included pamphlets on the work of branch committees, literature secretaries, preparing and discussing branch budgets, running a successful branch social, organising 'invitation meetings' – meetings open to non-members – and a host of other duties and skills. But there is every reason to believe that the internal life of branches was not intellectually vigorous. At the start of our period the Cold War, as we have mentioned, provoked a 'vigilance' campaign which stifled discussion more than usually as Party members were enjoined to keep a look out for 'statements or conduct' considered harmful.<sup>34</sup> Branches were prohibited from forming 'horizontal' associations with one another, for here was a potential source of factionalism.<sup>35</sup> The disgruntled were

kept in isolation and a dissident such as Eric Heffer in 1947-8 was unaware of an Edward Upward or a Harry McShane sharing similar views, but 'contained' in other branches of the Party. Occasionally those guilty of 'consistent factional activity' were expelled from the Party, as in the case of Olive and A. E. Currie in 1951-2 who were found guilty of trying to discredit the *British Road to Socialism* by representing it as the product of 'right-wing opportunism'. But the membership was generally self-disciplined to an extraordinary degree. The Cold War context merely stiffened its resolve and drew it closer together. That is another reason why the events of 1956 were so disturbing to so many members. After 1956 the level of individual commitment seems to have fallen as the Political Resolution at the 26th congress in 1959 complained. But new life was injected into the membership at intervals thereafter beginning with CND when the Party finally decided in favour of unilateralism in 1960.

Leninist theory was hostile to the idea of separate organisation of members by ethnicity yet the Party adopted the expedient of allowing special branches of Nigerian, Cypriot, Indian and West Indian Communists during the period covered by this book. In the case of the Nigerians, initially organised in a so-called 'Robeson' branch after a 'mass influx' in 1950 when something like 150 joined the Party in London, Emile Burns and others in the leadership seem to have been motivated by a desire to give the individuals concerned a Marxist training which they could use in their own country.<sup>36</sup> In the case of the Cypriots, whose post-war numbers grew rapidly in the London area, the rationale for separate branches was based on language and the belief that once Cyprus gained independence the members would return to their homeland.<sup>37</sup> But by the mid-50s around 450 London-based Cypriots, many of whom had belonged to the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL) in Cyprus, were organised in these branches. By 1966 the number of such branches had risen to 30, organising around 1,200 members, with another 300 in the YCL. The branches came under their own co-ordinating body, the Cypriot Guiding Committee, and concerned themselves overwhelmingly with Cypriot and Greek affairs and the life of the immigrant communities. When the decision was taken in 1966 to merge the Cypriot branches with the nearest residential branches of the CPGB, membership fell away dramatically revealing what many Party members had long suspected: that the Cypriot groups had held together for cultural as much as political reasons. Parallel structures often acting autonomously could not be tolerated in an organisation fearful of factionalism and the Co-ordinating Committee set up to work within the Indian communities in Britain illustrated the dangers when pro-Chinese factionalism raised its head after the schism in Indian Communism in 1963. The handful of separate branches of Indian Communists – the biggest was in Southall

— were also closed down in 1966 with a resulting loss of (about 30) members. The Party was not so well off for members from the ethnic minorities that it could afford such losses as its earlier experience with a small number of West Indian residential branches in London had shown. The decision to merge these branches with the relevant residential branches of the CPGB in the mid-50s was consistent with the idea that the whole Party ought to be concerned with all of the organisation's objectives. But in practice the Party membership did not live up to this ideal and though the organisation demanded action against racism, it is more than likely that some of its own members shared the prejudices which were then so prevalent. I examine this issue in more detail in chapter three.

## WOMEN

In 1943 the *Daily Worker* began to incorporate women readers on to its editorial board. Sheila Lynd became women's editor and succeeded, according to one of her former colleagues, in breaking out of the self-imposed limitations of most newspapers on 'women's issues'.<sup>38</sup> A national women's advisory committee was set up in 1944 to become one of the six advisory sub-committees reporting to the Executive and the Party began to publish *Woman Today* in an effort to reach a female audience. By the 1950s the Party's Organisation Department believed that 'in every branch and borough there is a basis for forming a women's section of the Party'. The main value of such sections — themselves another initiative of 1944 — was said to be that they 'provide a method of work which enables hundreds of housewives who are members ... who find it difficult to fit in the ordinary work of the branches to play a part'. They were also said to be a good method 'of reaching out in every locality to masses of working class women'. Work among women duly became an item of annual monitoring reports from the Districts in the early 1950s.<sup>39</sup> Wales reported a 'reluctance in many branches to bring women into active political work' and identified 'less than a dozen women' from the Party in 1951 working in factories. The North East also admitted that there had been 'little success in building women's sections and groups'. In Scotland, by contrast, the 'District [had] been giving fairly continuous attention to the development of women's work' and the 'level of activity [had been] raised considerably and to the point where [the] claims of the women to leadership are increasingly being recognised'. Lancashire also claimed that 'one of the most encouraging signs in the District is [the] numbers of new women coming into leading political activity' and this was despite the recession in the cotton industry which was still one of the mainstays of female factory work in the area.

Women such as Betty Reid, Margot Heinemann, Barbara Ruhemann, Elinor Burns, Kay Beauchamp, Joan Bellamy, Isabel Brown, Marian Ramelson, Nora Jeffery and Frances Dean filled

important leadership roles and there were many others like them in the organisation. But it was harder for women to get fully involved in the Party as the composition of a typical congress illustrates. Whereas 448 men attended the 1952 congress, only 72 women did, of whom 26 were classified as housewives. The wives of Communists might not actually belong to the Party of course – a common enough complaint during recruitment drives. A proportion of those who did belong struggled under the weight of the usual unequal burdens. ‘Today I am left laying the oilcloth while “He” is out shouting “Down with serfdom”, complained one *Daily Worker* correspondent.<sup>40</sup> Even more tellingly a report on a special Sunday meeting of women Party members in Birmingham in 1958 made much of the fact that they had managed to get a ‘Women’s Day, when the rest of the family must take over the chores and let Mum spread her wings a bit’.<sup>41</sup> The impression that this was a rare treat is reinforced by the fact that the meeting in question was just three and a half hours long, not even the Day it was cracked up to be. Yet women comprised one-third of the 25,000 members in 1958 and the Party leadership could see that it was necessary to attract more women into the organisation and make better use of the existing female membership. It was no accident that the initiatives taken to appeal to women in 1944-5 came at a time when women were prominent in the workforce. But by 1951 the female proportion of the workforce was little different than in 1911 (30.8 per cent as compared to 29.7) and the numbers of working wives and part-time women workers was only just on the increase in the years that followed.<sup>42</sup> The Party belonged to a male-dominated society and was probably well ahead of its rivals in its concern for female equality.

## **YOUTH**

Young people were perceived to be a bigger problem for the Party than were women. In the first place it did not have enough of them. In 1951, the Party claimed 5,000 members of the YCL. On the eve of the Khruschev speech it was down to 2,623. But by February 1958 the membership of the YCL was halved again to 1,387 and it was thought necessary to draft 500 adults into the organisation to reinvigorate it.<sup>43</sup> A similar trick was tried in 1960 – this time *Challenge* was given a new look and the campaign to boost membership was driven at each District level by one of the ‘best comrades’ becoming ‘youth representative’. Membership did indeed rise from 1,387 to just 1,734 in 1960. Yet the years in between these initiatives saw many young people taking up radical politics. It was soon apparent that the pole of attraction was the New Left which rejected both the Party and, according to Communist analysis, ‘Transport House’ too. Eric Hobsbawm’s report to the Executive on this subject in 1958 observed that the activists in question were ‘pretty much uninterested in the Party, which is not an issue for them. For most of these youngsters the Party has never been a force to

reckon with in their lifetime, in the middle class and student environment in which they work. (This, by the way, reflects their marked lack of contact with the Labour organisations such as trade unions). The big issues for them are things like Suez, anti-colonialism, the H-bomb, culture and "being on the left" in a vague general sense'.<sup>44</sup> Hobsbawm's analysis raised the question of why the New Left had been more effective in attracting young people on anti-colonial issues (such as the French war in Algeria) than the Communists and why – for all the Party's peace agitations – it exercised more appeal in channelling the opposition to war and the H-bomb. Part of his explanation was that the people associated with *Universities and Left Review* had taken over much of the organisational work in London for the Aldermaston march and had established political links with the Movement for Colonial Freedom and Victory for Socialism.

He also suggested that the Party had been guilty of neglect:

I have attempted to draw attention to those characteristics which distinguish *ULR* from the other products of the post-Hungary period for more than a year. I would like, in passing, to observe that I have seen no Party official – not even, if I am right, the student and youth organisers whose business it is to keep the Party informed about this sort of thing, at any of the meetings or activities of these people. I therefore conclude that the Party's information about this phenomenon has hitherto been very defective ...

Indeed the Executive had not discussed Party policy towards youth since 1952 and it was 1958 before it did so again. When it came, the analysis saw nothing new on the horizon. Television, cinema, many of the artefacts of popular consumption – all were aimed at youth, it was conceded. And while consumer business lavished attention on young people, it was clear that the Labour Party (which had disbanded its youth organisation) and the trade unions neglected young people. But the Executive took the view that the Communists had correctly identified the pressing issues for the youth which consisted of the right to work, increased wages, comprehensive training schemes, a forty hour week, good health and safety regulations, and decent holiday entitlements. The only other issues it perceived as being of importance were ending nuclear tests, cutting the length of conscription, raising the school leaving age and making more provision for sport and recreation.<sup>45</sup> The 'youth drive' conducted in 1961 was similarly informed. The 'problem of youth', only existed in the countries of capitalism, according to the Executive and it could be addressed by improving educational and recreational facilities. It was all very worthy, but the connections between national deficiencies in facilities for youth and YCL membership or sales of *Challenge* were unclear.<sup>46</sup> The Executive admitted that the attitude was often expressed in the Party that modern

youth had become 'difficult' and not interested in politics – a judgement that it rejected. But it allowed that 'We are losing the battle for the future in the continued neglect of the problem'. It was a perception which the Party shared with various official enquiries (the Carr Committee, Crowther Committee, Albermarle Report and other hand-wringing exercises) which came to similar conclusions on the inadequacy of recruitment and training of young people, and the inadequacy of education and leisure facilities, and produced vague worries about the teenage consumer. But it is a measure of the Party's conservatism on youth that it often could not see beyond the Establishment's analysis of what was happening. The 'teenager' had come into existence but the Party was on the wrong side of the generation divide and was inclined to perceive 'fads' such as rock 'n' roll – in the best tradition of old fogies everywhere – as the 'depraved offshoot' of a more wholesome folk music.<sup>47</sup>

The children of Party members were a special case of the 'personal is political' and though many of them showed no interest in the organisation a large proportion of the YCL – perhaps one quarter – consisted of such offspring. It was never high enough in the leadership's view and in order to rectify the shortfall the Political Committee recommended in 1958 that the Districts 'should try to organise events for our children, from time to time, to bring them together, give them a sense of belonging to our Party or being cared for by the Party. All of us want our children to find their way easily and confidently into the YCL and then into the Party.'<sup>48</sup> The testimonies of the children who did so and who remember what it was like to be a Communist in the 1950s are inevitably mixed.<sup>49</sup> A common theme is the tremendously stimulating cultural and social environment in which they grew up – the Political Committee's advice was evidently superfluous for many families. Life was replete with meetings and marches and social activities of many kinds – festivals, concerts, drama groups, choirs and above all rich conversation. 'Culture, party and politics were all one' for Michael Rosen who remembered family discussions about Shakespeare, the Second World War, Cable Street, and being Jewish as 'being all part of the same thing somehow'.<sup>50</sup> Related to this theme is the memory of the running commentary on events provided by extremely well-read parents who challenged and questioned received opinion whether the source was school, the BBC or Hollywood. Another commonality is the consciousness of belonging to a big family, a 'secret society', even a 'conspiracy', but also, and perhaps above all, of a world movement with representatives in every country. Others complain of the absent fathers constantly away at meetings and a benevolent Party paternalism that could be stifling. But for most the Party was 'a society of great friends'. The problem was attracting people to it in the first place. For the recruitment of youth was perceived as vital to keep the organisation relevant even in its traditional areas of strength. There were exceptions

— such as Jimmy Reid<sup>51</sup> and Arthur Scargill — but in the 1950s the Party was not attracting young working class trade unionists either in the numbers or of the calibre required to fuel its strategy of providing leadership at both the rank and file and the national levels.

## LITERATURE AND EDUCATION

Once a new member was recruited it was necessary to provide him or her with an education. All members of the Party were also expected to educate their work and neighbourhood acquaintances by selling Party literature. But it is doubtful that a bigger concentration of people dedicated to books was to be found anywhere else in the country. Wanting to understand the world was one of the driving forces of Party members. Seeming to know about the world was one of the things which distinguished the working class Communist in the company of his or her work mates. Thousands of Communists may have seemed to be polymaths in their places of work, but the Party itself was never satisfied with the level of education of the average member. It could never be anything but dissatisfied about the distribution of Party literature. The CP owned bookshops in London, Glasgow, Sheffield, Chatham, Brighton, Leeds, Birmingham, and Bristol at various times in the period after 1951 (in Birmingham a bookshop and social club — the Star Club — was opened as late as 1971) but the branches were much more important for the sale of Party literature, especially to members of the public, though the circulation of journals such as *World News* (almost 14,000 in 1951) and *Communist Review* (just 4,500) was negligible beyond the Party faithful. *Labour Monthly*, which insisted on its independence from the Party (as consistently and as convincingly as Sinn Fein denied any connection with the Provisional IRA), managed to sell between 9 and 10 thousand in the same year. Literature sales varied enormously when it came to pamphlets. Within three months of the appearance of the first edition of the party programme, the *British Road to Socialism*, 176,000 copies had been sold. *How to Beat the Tories* sold 42,760 copies in 1951 while *Negotiate Now* sold 69,753, though more typical sales of pamphlets in 1951 were of the order of 10–20,000, with some reaching the 40,000 mark.<sup>52</sup> Ten years later *World of Difference* sold 41,679, *Common Market* 9,357, *Woman Today* 4,764, *Gaitskell or Socialism* 27,746, and *The German Menace* 38,099. The trend in sales was down and the evidence suggests that normally the number of pamphlets reaching members of the public was very much smaller than the number purchased by members of the Party.

The ideal branch — residential or factory — had its own literature secretary. Of the twelve factory branches in the Manchester area in the early 1950s that were so organised, for example, it is clear from a Party audit that much depended on the individual personnel in any particular branch and even an establishment with a strong Party presence such as Metro-Vickers could report that organised sales had ‘virtually

ceased' in 1951 when the personnel changed. Similarly, while 'steady sales' were recorded at a number of factories in the Glasgow area (such as Rolls Royce), the position was weak at large-scale concerns such as John Brown's and Singers, despite the relative strength of the Party in those undertakings. Predictably, literature sales were the subject of constant exhortation, analysis, and ingenious initiative. Branches were encouraged to compete against each other, various book club schemes were begun, new publishing initiatives sought out a mass readership (via series such as 'Books for Progress'), detailed reports were commissioned (on the attitude of the book trade for example),<sup>53</sup> members were urged to place orders with the public libraries, and so on.

Education was not simply for the ordinary members in the branches. Day-schools and weekend schools were regular features of the education plans for each 'school year', organised at District and national levels. The Party education programme for 1953-4, for example, was as exhaustive and elaborate as it could conceivably be for such a small organisation. Special schools were held for industrial cadres, women, youth, full-timers, miners, builders, furniture workers, print workers, clerical workers, teachers, doctors and university staff. Their duration varied from month-long to weekend and day-schools. The subject matter included analyses of Soviet policy statements and speeches, the state, the national and colonial questions, Party strategy in Britain, socialist realism, philosophy, and the history of the British labour movement.<sup>54</sup> In 1959-60 the syllabus studied included 'Marxism versus Reformism', 'Peace or War?' 'The Class Struggle', 'Political Economy', and 'Imperialism'. In the year 1960-61 two- and three-day weekend schools were run in eight of the Districts and a further ten Districts ran weekend schools for women. Separate national schools were organised for students, women, industrial workers, the YCL, and full-timers (the latter involving eight students on a two-week course). Towards the end of 1952 a day school was organised for the Executive Committee so that it could consider the implications of Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism for the British Road to Socialism* and resolve apparent contradictions between the Party's new-found faith in a peaceful, parliamentary transition to socialism and the Russian leader's assertion that wars were inevitable in an age of imperialist decline. It was Stalin's support for both of these propositions which demanded an exercise of the leadership's dialectical imagination.

The first meeting of the Party History Commission in 1957 concluded that no amount of ingenuity, however, could make it possible to write a 'complete history' of the Party just yet, though 'work towards a history of the party' could begin immediately.<sup>55</sup> The emergence of alternative sources of Marxist analysis after 1956 made the prospect of written Party histories more likely, but in a form that could only damage its prestige. The appearance of the *New Reasoner*, *Universities and Left Review* and the Trotskyist *Labour Review*

provided reasons why a new theoretical journal – proposed by Klugmann at the end of 1956 – was launched in 1957 to replace *Marxist Quarterly*. *Marxism Today* would have to combat Labour and New Left ‘revisionism’ and the Executive saw it as important enough to warrant John Gollan taking on the editorship with Klugmann as his assistant.<sup>56</sup> It began life with a sales figure of just over 4,000, reaching 4,341 in January 1960. Three years after its birth a progress report concluded that ‘in general we have to be quicker off the mark in taking up the challenge in all fields by bourgeois writers and thinkers’.<sup>57</sup> This was a tall order, given the Party’s slender resources, but it was probably made more difficult by the perception that a strong point of the journal was its economic analyses (attributed to the work of the Economic sub-committee) which continued to work within a ‘Marxist-Leninist’ framework on questions of imperialism, the general crisis of capitalism and the theoretical treatment of modern social democracy. The truth was that the Leninist analysis of these issues made less and less sense of the world as the 1950s drew to a close.

Yet educational work was supposed to be designed to take into account the main ideological trends and conflicts taking place in the left milieu which the Party wanted to dominate. The education plan for 1960-61, for example, realised that there was much work to be done clarifying the ‘confusion’ about the Soviet Union which currently prevented many leftists from joining the Communist Party. It also had to address the Labour revisionists who asserted that affluence had arrived and was here to stay. These people also equated socialism with the welfare state. The main task, therefore, was to combat false theories of socialism:

On the one hand the right wing, through the medium of Gaitskell and the books and articles of Strachey, Crosland and others, continue to wage the battle to discredit Marxism-Leninism as being ‘irrelevant’ and out of date, and to propagate the view that we are now living in the post-capitalist society ... in the ‘affluent’ society ... On the other hand, in pamphlets issued by *Tribune* writers like John Hughes and in the Fabian pamphlets of Titmuss and Crossman there are the beginnings of criticism of the ‘Welfare State’ of ‘managed capitalism’ and the policy of no more nationalisation. In Crossman’s pamphlet especially, as well as in the latest book by Isaac Deutscher, there are open admissions of the superiority of the socialist economic order and the full recognition that the Soviet aim of overtaking the capitalist world both in *per capita* production and in living standards, is not only realisable in the future but is actually beginning to take place now.

The new ‘left’ attack on Marxism and the Soviet Union increasingly follows the main lines of capitalist propaganda. This is to admit the superiority of the socialist economic system but to declare that this economic advance is made at the expense of sacrificing everything that makes life

worth living and which is the essence of life in 'the West' – liberty, democracy, impartial justice for all, the rights of the individual, freedom of opinion, of press, etc ...<sup>58</sup>

The Communists entered the new decade determined to uphold the tenets of Marxism-Leninism and counter the distortions of its enemies in relation to the USSR and the various relationships that were supposed to expose its shortcomings – socialism and freedom, socialism and liberty, socialism and democracy, socialism and the individual, and socialism and moral values.

### DAILY WORKER

Heavy theory was not the province of the Party press, which chiefly concerned itself with industrial and political news of use to militant shop stewards. The Communists actually made a professional job of this, particularly in the years up to 1956.<sup>59</sup> In that year the *Daily Worker* employed 35 journalists of whom 14 had training before joining the newspaper and 21 acquired it on the job. Of the 35, 17 were under 40 years old, 25 under 45 years old. Allen Hutt was chiefly responsible for the layout and typography that gave the paper award-winning standards of design.<sup>60</sup> He also inculcated the work patterns of a commercial newspaper office into the staff. Expanding the sales and readership of the *Daily Worker* was a constant concern and the subject of innumerable 'drives', special issues and periodic content analysis. During the war ambitious plans had been laid, when circulation topped 100,000, for sales that would rival the capitalist newspapers. A new press was installed in the purpose-built modern building in Farringdon Road which the paper was moved into. But these ambitions were soon disappointed. Sales fell from a peak of 120,000 recorded in 1948 and the collapse was faster than the parallel decline of membership. Daily sales such as those achieved on the Festival of Britain building site, where 180 copies were bought, give an indication of the Party's reach in particular factories, pits and workplaces.<sup>61</sup> But in the course of 1956 circulation went down by around 20 per cent to 63,000 by April. Morgan points out that less than one-tenth of the circulation depended on street and factory sales by 1955, perhaps evidence of the diminishing significance of street politics.<sup>62</sup> On the eve of the upheaval of 1956 a majority of the Executive took the view that the paper had to become more popular in style and content, though there was still a minority demanding an even more pronouncedly Party newspaper combining more Marxist theory with reports on Party initiatives.<sup>63</sup> Klugmann, the Party's education and propaganda expert, identified the paper's 'minimal political tasks' in the following order; wages, jobs, automation, rent and housing, arms and peace, colonial liberation, parliamentary news, essential foreign affairs, and the socialist world. The paper was aimed at the politically literate, left-

wing trade union militant but it was agreed that more had to be done to personalise, humanise and 'picturise' stories even for the industrial and activist vanguard. A real effort was made to make it a family read too with special features aimed at women and children. None of this addressed the fact that no viewpoint other than those of Communists was given credibility in its pages. Lively controversy was thus virtually unheard of and this remained the case when the *Morning Star* replaced the *Daily Worker* in April 1966. Any appeal it had beyond Party households largely depended on its appeal to the activist minority of male trade unionists.

## CAMPAIGNS

The Communist Party was constantly running campaigns at both national and regional levels – 7,000 public meetings were held in 1952 alone – but attracting support was often difficult. A report of the Lancashire and Cheshire District in 1952 – there is no reason to suppose that it is untypical of District reports for that year – showed that in the previous twelve months it had organised marches and demonstrations in Chester and Warrington against the American occupation of Britain; in Liverpool and Manchester against German Rearmament; in Nelson, Bolton, Burnley, and Oldham over the crisis in the cotton industry; and in Liverpool and Manchester in favour of the Five-Power Peace Pact. In Morecambe, on the eve of the Labour Party conference, the District full-timers organised protests against the ideological direction taken by the Labour leadership and in Liverpool and Manchester they helped to produce the biggest May Day demonstrations for 'many years'.<sup>64</sup> A similarly impressive number of factory gate meetings – about four per week – was recorded for the same period, most of them centred around Metros, Gorton Tank, and Peacocks in Manchester, Horwich Loco and Liverpool and Salford docks, with much less frequent meetings at such Manchester establishments as Clayton Aniline and Ferranti's. But all this factory gate work drew a total estimated audience of just 12,000 while the various demonstrations often mustered hundreds, sometimes thousands, but never tens of thousands of people. The same source – which was no more mechanical in its quantitative presentation of the year's work than other Districts – noted that 484 open air meetings were held during the year attracting around 48,000 people all told, or an average of 100 per meeting.

There is an air of routine about much of this work which was absent in the campaign to expose the McCarthyite denial of democratic rights in the USA. This had been underway, in one form or another, since the second half of 1947 and the issue offers an example of how the Party operated. National campaigning was supplemented by regional initiatives such as the Conference in Defence of Democratic Rights in America that was convened in Glasgow in

October 1955. Gordon McLennan, a future leader of the Party, was a key organiser. From this emerged the Committee of Scottish-American Friendship for Democratic Rights. The campaign derived strength from the fact that Paul Robeson – himself a victim of McCarthyism – supported the protest, sending a message to the conference which referred to ‘the rise of racism in the US’. Robeson was both popular in Britain and close to the Communists. Claudia Jones was unheard of, but as a black Communist facing deportation from the USA, she provided another asset for propaganda purposes, albeit one of less value than Robeson.<sup>65</sup> The campaign organisers knew from the beginning of the persecution of Robeson – in August 1950 the State Department announced the cancellation of his passport – that his particular case held vast potential for the mobilisation of an anti-American agitation. The CP full-timers in the Districts informed headquarters that a national campaign was in the making. Much of the early correspondence stressed the need for a Willi Munzenberg<sup>66</sup> approach to the membership of the organising committees – with plenty of non-Communists, preferably high-profile people, among the named leaders of the campaign. But this was easy to attain because the cause – restoration of Robeson’s basic rights – spontaneously appealed to a broad range of socialists and liberals. A National Paul Robeson Committee was established. The Musician’s Union (29,000 members) was one of the first to affiliate. The London Paul Robeson Committee, chaired by Tom Driberg, was able to announce a ‘sponsoring council’ consisting of Nye Bevan, Benjamin Britten, Margaret Cole, Canon Collins, Fenner Brockway, Fred Lee, Ben Levy, Hugh MacDiarmid, Ian Mikardo, Sidney Silverman and Anthony Wedgwood Benn. A similar committee was established in Manchester with Communists such as Wilf Charles, Mick Costello, Vic Eddisford and Frank Loesser also heavily involved.

The Communist Party took care of the grass roots running of the campaign through the involvement of such national organisers as John Williamson (a Communist deported from the USA in 1955), Idris Cox, and Barbara Drake. A Paul Robeson Passport Petition, boasting an impressive list of trade union sponsors, was addressed to President Eisenhower, demanding justice for Robeson. D. N. Pritt prepared an *amicus curiae* brief on the Robeson case in 1956. It eventually foundered on a technicality and the Party’s American friends took the blame; but it served a purpose. In the preparatory work Pritt worked alongside the Haldane Society and its continental equivalents such as the *Association Internationale Des Juristes Democrates* based in Brussels. As much publicity as possible was dedicated to exposing ‘political repression in the USA’. Harry Francis of the Musician’s Union organised ‘respectable’ sources to finance Robeson’s legal action. Concerts at the Royal Festival Hall and the London Palladium were scheduled for 1958. Model resolutions were prepared for the

TUC, STUC and Labour Party. The Robeson agitation, which ended when the passport was returned in June 1958, was on a par with some of the classic campaigns of the Munzenberg era. But there were plenty of other issues on which the CP campaigned in splendid isolation and others in which it was possible to assemble only some of the ingredients mentioned above. For all the Party's organising genius it was not always possible to develop the necessary popular sympathy to give a campaign impact. This truism may well have applied to its own membership which seems to have been lacking in enthusiasm for all sorts of issues, if the constant complaints and cajolery of King Street are to be believed. But when the cause was close to the Party's heart and the circumstances were right, it was possible to mount impressive campaigns throughout the period examined here as the mass lobbies of the TUC and the May Day strike of 1969 showed in pushing the unions into open opposition to the Labour Government's White Paper *In Place of Strife*.

### FACTORY BRANCHES

Industrial work was a priority. The Industrial Organiser occupied one of the two or three top jobs in the Party. Peter Kerrigan replaced George Allison in this capacity in 1951 and held the position until 1966 when Bert Ramelson took over. Vic Feather argued, in the context of the unfolding Cold War, that the factory cells of the Party overtook residential branches in importance in the late 1940s. In fact the Party created factory branches from the autumn of 1946, partly in response to the weakening of its position in industry which ensued when it decided to dissolve workplace groups in 1945. The conciliatory 'spirit of Tehran' had informed the decision to dissolve the workplace groups, while the rapid construction of factory branches in 1947-8 was influenced by the deteriorating international situation. As the wartime alliance turned to Cold War the Communists in Britain launched an offensive where they thought it would hurt. In his pamphlet *How Do The Communists Work?* (1953), Feather argued that the factory branches came directly under the control of Kerrigan, assisted by Mick Bennett, head of the Organisation Department. Thus when a dispute erupted, as at Ford's and Brigg's at Dagenham in June 1952, the whole membership of the local CP was mobilised by King Street, while full-timers offered advice on tactics.<sup>67</sup> The AEU local full-time organiser for Ford's shop stewards was a long-standing Party member; the convenor of Ford's shop stewards was Con O'Keefe, another member of the CP; six of the seven shop stewards on the 'Committee of Seven' were Communists; the AEU divisional organiser and chair of the London District of the Confederation of Engineering and Shipbuilding Unions was also chair of the Party's London District Committee and a member of its Executive Committee; even the Party's Industrial Department had a full-timer who worked at Ford's until 1951 -

inevitably as a shop steward. Feather suggested that the importance of Ford Dagenham to the Communists was its role in the export trade and its potential for rearmament purposes. With the experience gained by its Ford workers the Party was ready to sabotage the plant whenever required to do so by its Russian masters, or so the argument ran. Similar arguments were still being put by the organisation's enemies at the end of the 1960s. The Radcliffe Committee of 1962, for example, reported that Communist penetration of the Civil Service trade unions was greater than in almost any other section of the labour movement, allegedly all the better for the infiltration and paralysis of the state machine which the Communists would engineer at some unspecified point in the future.

The Communists were popularly held to be ubiquitous in industrial disputes either as the cause, the organising brain or the cheerleader, except when they were all three. The Party's own propaganda often encouraged this view of its potency and there is no doubt that Communists were often prominent participants and organisers in the industrial disputes of the 1950s, as at Ford in 1952. Con O'Keefe's desk at Ford's, for example, was identified as the organising centre for the disruption by worried government officials who reported that his office was popularly known as 'the Kremlin'.<sup>68</sup> They also noted the prominence of Communists in the dock disputes of 1948, 1949, and 1951, the strikes at Rolls-Royce Aero-Engines in February 1951, Austin Motors in 1952-3, and Standard Motors in April 1956, to take some important examples. The Communists' nefarious reputation was just as strong in the 1960s. Strikes such as the protracted dispute at the Barbican and Horseferry Road building sites, which lasted 13 months, were, according to the Cameron Inquiry of 1967, hotbeds of Communist organisation and a fertile source of recruitment into the Party.<sup>69</sup> It was Communist organisational genius which brought the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions into existence in 1966 as a development of the London Industrial Shop Stewards Defence Committee which had acted as an umbrella organisation for Communist-led shop stewards committees and unofficial groups across a range of industries. Well into the 1970s the Communist presence in British industry was seemingly as potent as it was conspicuous. The Party attached high hopes to its industrial activities. John Gollan said of the factory branches in 1953 'It is no exaggeration to say that this is the key to the most rapid transformation of the entire Party position in Britain'. But unlike its more sensationalist critics, the Party could be candid about the real state of play in this area of its work. Finlay Hart, Secretary of the Scottish Party, explained that of the 120 factory branches operating in Scotland in 1953, 10 per cent were good, 25 per cent were just starting to work, 40 per cent had one or two good points and 25 per cent existed in name only.<sup>70</sup> In reality it proved an uphill struggle to main-

tain the Party's factory branches throughout the 1950s and 1960s in all parts of Britain.

The idea of forming separate Communist trade unions in Britain had been killed off in the inter-war years. But as we have seen the idea that individual Communist trade unionists acted upon the instructions of the Party continued to be regarded as perfectly credible throughout the years under review – if only by the Party's many opponents.<sup>71</sup> As a memo prepared for the General Council put it in 1948:

The Communist Party is not merely a political party. It is structurally different from every other political party, all of which are organised on a national basis and carry on their work within geographical boundaries. The Communist Party ... is constructed on a functional basis. Its most active and craftily planned arrangements operate inside the trade union movement ... the Party centre ... directs the whole of these subversive activities [from] outside the Trade Union Movement.<sup>72</sup>

When this thesis was subsequently elaborated in the TUC publication *Defend Democracy*, it was observed that where possible – as in France and Italy – whole unions would be brought under the control of the Party if the Communists had their way. This was a very remote possibility in Britain but the idea persisted that the ubiquitous Communists operated within the unions with a degree of cunning and efficiency which allowed them to manipulate much larger forces than they controlled directly. Harold Wilson implied something along these lines when he observed in the House of Commons, on 22 June 1966, during the seamen's strike, that the Party operated 'an efficient and disciplined industrial apparatus controlled by headquarters. No major strike occurs anywhere in this country in any sector of industry in which the apparatus does not concern itself'. Bert Ramelson, who had just become the Party's national Industrial Organiser, was identified in the press as 'the most powerful man in Britain' on the strength of Wilson's speech.<sup>73</sup> How then did the Party conduct its trade union work? What truth, if any, was contained in such allegations?

The organisation certainly expected all of its members to belong to a trade union if they were eligible to do so and national congress reports show that a very high proportion of delegates actually did so. The Communist trade unionist, moreover, was committed to trade union work in a special way. Not only was he more inclined than most to do the mundane but necessary organisational work of the unions, he did so as part of a team with a sense of mission and a measure of organisational support denied to most trade unionists. He knew he had to tread warily, however, that there were definite limits – with variation according to the strength of the Communist presence – beyond which it was unwise to press his politics. The Party's centres

of strength in the trade unions were fairly stable, partly because they observed this injunction. An analysis of the membership conducted by the Organisation Department in February 1955 showed that 3,250 Party members belonged to the AEU and that Scotland (581 members), London (386), Midlands (358), West Middlesex (319), Lancashire (296) and Yorkshire (296) were the main Communist strongholds in the union.<sup>74</sup> The NUM provided the second largest contingent with Scotland (658) and Wales (377) well ahead of Yorkshire (202), East Midlands (146) and the North East (129), not to mention the Kent (60), Midlands (56) and the Lancashire coalfields (41). A nearly identical number of Communists (1659) belonged to the much larger TGWU, which, with 1.3 million members, wielded more votes at the TUC and the Labour Party conference than any other union. Just over one thousand Communists belonged to the NUT, compared with only 40 in the National Union of Seamen. For the Party's enemies, however, the number of Communists in a union was not the real issue – the Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers were given special attention in the TUC's *The Tactics of Disruption* even though the Party could count only 56 members in the union in 1955. What mattered more than the numbers of Communists was their ability to get their own way, a capacity which scaremongers attributed to their deviousness and organisational ability. The Party sometimes encouraged this view, as we have seen, by promoting the idea that since its inception it had been 'in the forefront of every industrial struggle in Britain'.<sup>75</sup> Real examples of Communist deviousness could also be found. The most notorious example of Communist manipulation in the 1950s was the ETU, an organisation in which the Party counted 831 members, a similar figure to its presence in the NUGMW (784), USDAW (684), the NUR (670), the CAWU (666), and the ASW (501). The significant difference, however, was that the Communists in the ETU, massively outnumbered by the rapidly growing membership, managed to obtain a disproportionate number of full-time positions and this was thought to give them power over the membership, by friend and foe alike.

Of the registered Party membership in 1955 of 32,681, over half – 22,503 – belonged to a trade union. The ten thousand not in unions were principally composed of housewives, students, the self-employed and the retired. When the trade union total is analysed according to industrial sector the principal strongholds turn out to be engineering (4721), building (2055), mining (1683), clerical (1668), education (1210), railways (945), distributive trades (860), clothing (691), iron and steel (526) print (457) and shipbuilding (415). In the docks the Party was perhaps weaker than might have been expected (172), given the high profile disputes it figured in 1948, 1949 and 1951; likewise in textiles (286) – given the size of the industry – and among seamen (just 52, of whom 40 were in the NUS) the Party was not strongly represented.

The Party's preferred basis for industrial work was the factory cell, as we have seen. The rationale for factory and pit branches had varied over the years, though the consistently large amount of attention given to this question by the Party leadership shows that tremendous importance was attached to it throughout the period. In the 1920s the priority given to factory and pit groups and committees was explained in terms of the greater opportunities for raising class consciousness at the point where capitalist exploitation took place; according to Leninist theory the antagonism of class interests might more easily be exposed at the point where exploitation took place. Mobilising the power of the working class in the factories could also assist in revealing 'the fallacy of purely parliamentary methods of struggle'. It helped in discrediting 'the reformist leadership', while the factory committees, which the Communist factory groups were enjoined to form, could be ultimately transformed into soviets.<sup>76</sup> By the 1950s, however, when the Communists adopted an apparently parliamentary road to socialism, it was stressed that the Party's factory branches complemented its electoral work – though there were always those who claimed the contrary, seeing the electoral contests as a costly diversion from the real centres of struggle and power.<sup>77</sup>

The significance of the workshop as the front line of class conflict continued to be emphasised, however, and when the 25th Congress called for 'a renewed drive to the factories' in 1957 and 1958, asking 'the whole Party to make the development of factory branches its first responsibility', it did so because it said 'the power of the working class is most easily mobilised and exerted where the process of capitalist exploitation brings them together and develops in them a working-class approach based on their common interests'.<sup>78</sup> The factory branch permitted access to both the organised and unorganised workers; it was the basis for agitational work; and it linked the Party centre and its District Committees to the mass of workers. Communists were encouraged to hold factory gate meetings and discussion circles; to sell Party literature, including regular factory newspapers containing short agitational articles composed by branch members; they were expected to 'seize every opportunity of rallying the workers to improve conditions' and do their utmost to achieve 100 per cent trade union organisation in the factories where they were active. The Communists were thus builders of unions, assiduous agents on behalf of unions – collecting the subs, distributing information, holding meetings, recruiting members, opposing apathy, cynicism and splitters. Even when they were denied the rights of ordinary members or when the union was run in a way calculated to obstruct rank and file militancy, as in the TGWU under Arthur Deakin's leadership, the Communists in the union continued to stress these virtues. When the 25th Congress of the Party urged the formation of more factory branches, it was a good year to be stressing these

virtues inside the TGWU. The union, now under Frank Cousins' leadership, had been committed to support a protracted strike of the London busmen which had been brought about, at least in part, because of the way in which Communist activists had strengthened their rank and file leadership position inside London transport in the recent past, notwithstanding Deakin's ban on their holding union office at any level.

But for all this emphasis on factory and pit branches the Party only managed to organise a small fraction of its membership this way – perhaps ten per cent in the 1950s, less than that by 1968. A survey conducted in 1957 revealed that of the 1,296 branches then extant, 410 were factory branches. They were distributed as follows:

**Communist Party branches (June 1957)<sup>79</sup>**

	TOTAL	FACTORY	AREA
LONDON	288	137	151
SCOTLAND	251	99	152
LANCASHIRE	128	41	87
YORKSHIRE	75	25	50
MIDLANDS	83	22	61
WALES	70	8	62
W. MIDDLESEX	53	23	30
SURREY	44	6	38
E. MIDLANDS	58	19	39
S. ESSEX	32	5	27
KENT	36	4	32
NORTH EAST	40	9	31
WEST OF ENGLAND	27	5	22
S. E. MIDLANDS	24	2	22
HANTS/DORSET	21	1	14
S. MIDLANDS	20	2	22
E. ANGLIA	13	0	13
TEESIDE	8	1	7
DEVON/CORNWALL	8	0	8
CHANNEL ISLANDS	2	0	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1296</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>886</b>

Between 1957 and 1963 the number of factory branches fell by around 36 per cent. The slide continued over the next five years as the table below illustrates.

Table 2: Factory branches<sup>80</sup>

	1963 Number	1963 Member- ship	1966 Number	1966 Member- ship	1968 Number	1968 Member- ship
London	76	793	62	609	43	493
Scotland	55	798	52	743	46	728
Lancashire	31	333	20	189	17	204
Yorkshire	10	168	10	239	14	253
Midlands	18	252	16	285	14	271
Wales	3	32	3	74	3	74
W. Middlesex	26	350	23	255	16	218
Surrey	12	100	12	64	8	46
S. Essex	7	152	4	77	6	78
E. Midlands	11	91	8	54		
Kent	5	51	3	63		
North East	2	10	-	-		
W. of England	3	21	3	25		
S. E. Midlands	3	48	2	42		
Hants/Dorset	1	13	1	12		
Sussex	1	15	1	10		
S. Midlands	1	22	2	38		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>263</b>	<b>3249</b>	<b>222</b>	<b>2779</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>2576</b>

The table shows that the number of factory branches fell by a remarkable 31 per cent in the five years ending in 1968 and that there was a proportionate fall in the number of members organised this way (about 27 per cent). A number of districts ceased to have any factory branches at all by 1968 and even the strongholds of London and Lancashire experienced the trend decline. Scotland fared less badly, however, and Yorkshire and the Midlands managed to bring more members into factory branches – perhaps reflecting the success of the Party in the coalfields of Yorkshire and the car plants of the Midlands. While 800 residential branches existed in 1968 (plus a further 25 student branches) only 182 factory branches survived and some of these must have hung by a thread because they accounted for only 8.5 per cent of the total membership of the Party – and the trend was clearly down. The Party leadership viewed this pattern with alarm; the organisation had lost 289 branches since 1957, of which 228 were factory branches.

The factory branches were given valuable assistance by the Party's Industrial Department, even though the Organisation Department was responsible for the branches *qua* branches. It was the Industrial Organiser who sought to co-ordinate the Party's industrial work. When Ramelson became Industrial Organiser in 1966 his work was supported

by full-timers such as Dennis Goodwin, Julie Jacobs and Jim Saunders, as well as the voluntary labour of Party members at King Street, together with a network of regional industrial organisers in London, Leeds, and Glasgow. Peter Kerrigan, his predecessor, could call on the support of Fred Eastwood (London District industrial organiser) and Frank Jackson and various volunteers for *ad hoc* projects. The centre ideally provided strategy, co-ordination, education, guidance, and advice, especially with regard to union elections. It would organise industrial schools for particular industries in which the Party was relatively strong, such as mining and engineering. The Industrial Department also co-ordinated and planned its interventions and physical presence at the TUC congress. Kerrigan and Ramelson would oversee developments in person at these congresses quite openly.

The development of the industrial cadre was an ongoing preoccupation. In accordance with a decision of the 29th Congress in 1965 to campaign for more factory branches, as part of its vision of 'a mass movement of such scope and power as to win decisive changes of policy in Britain', a Party factory branch conference was held in London in June 1966 – just eight days before Wilson's outburst in Parliament naming the Communists as the cause of all industrial disputes. It was attended by 236 people, of whom 86 belonged to factory branches. Though the shrinkage of employment in mining (175,000), shipbuilding and marine engineering (63,000) and railways (100,000) was identified as a contributory factor in the withering of factory branches during the years 1959–64 – evidence being produced to show that most were lost because of pit and factory closures rather than for 'political reasons or organisational neglect' – the delegates admitted that employment had expanded in engineering and electrical industries (275,000), building (235,000), and print and publishing (53,000) in the same period. The truth was that the Party was not recruiting young workers and had not been doing so for some time. The conference identified over 2,600 factories with more than 500 employees which it targeted with the immediate aim of creating 50 new factory branches before the end of the year.

We have seen that the decline continued nonetheless and a further report of January 1968<sup>81</sup> revealed an 'appalling state of organisation' in the transport industry in particular (docks, bus depots and road haulage). Membership in these areas looked as follows:

#### **Branch number of members**

London Docks	75
Dalston Bus Depot	9
Larkfield, Glasgow	6
Glasgow Docks	2 or 3
Liverpool Docks	24

Manchester Transport	10
Southampton Docks	12
Avonmouth Docks	5 or 6
Hull Docks	4 or 5
Leeds Buses	6

Elsewhere the factory branches ranged from the 81 militants organised at Rolls Royce, Glasgow – where dues were paid, the *Morning Star* sales were good and meetings were regular – to places where a factory branch existed but no meetings were held (Edge Lane Cars), or leadership was lacking (English Steel, Openshaw) and membership was as low as two or three individuals (Metal Box and AEI in the West Middlesex district). Some of the best were to be found in the car industry by the late 1960s, as at Longbridge and Leyland's Tractors and Transmissions factory in Birmingham, and the Party dominated the shop stewards' Combine, which linked the parts of British Leyland. Though variable quality had always existed, by 1968 there were no factory branches in engineering bigger than that at Rolls Royce Glasgow, which had around 80 members. BOAC in West Middlesex had 57 members, but such branches were rare – a relatively large one now would have around twenty-five members, but most had fewer than ten. The Party factory branch was in danger of extinction, not least because of factory closures. In engineering, for example, the Party had a sizeable presence in 1968 at places such as Massey Ferguson, GEC Openshaw, Ferranti, and Hawker Siddley in Manchester, Firth Brown, Davey United, BSC and Shardlows in Sheffield. But by end of the 1970s most of these were gone.

## INDUSTRIAL ADVISORIES

A paper drafted by Ben Bradley in May 1955 described how the Industrial Department had responsibility under the Organisation Committee for the work of Advisory Committees and Industrial Committees.<sup>82</sup> At that time Advisory Committees existed for Metal and Engineering, Building, Transport, Health, Education, Agriculture, Mining, and Distribution. Their terms of reference had been outlined in 1944.<sup>83</sup> Advisories existed to bring Communist militants in the same industry together so that they could co-ordinate their work. They pooled information of the state of the industry which was relayed back to King Street. They acted as transmission belts for the formulation and dissemination of Party policy. Above all they allowed Communists in the same industry to plan their political interventions in the unions and organise electoral machines capable of winning office for candidates backed by the Party. Bradley also proposed that within those industries covered by an Advisory Committee, special committees ought to be established 'for the formulation and operation of policy within partic-

ular sections of the industry'. Thus in transport, separate committees would be set up for rails, shipping and docks; in metal separate committees would concern themselves with shipbuilding, steel, electricity, engineering and so on. Each committee was led by a convenor, in most cases a London Party member who was directly responsible to the Industrial Department, but closely linked with the parent Advisory Committee. Bradley's document shows that the Party saw the need for more Advisory Committees 'wherever the necessary basis exists'. Furnishing, clothing, and chemicals were given as examples. He also argued that District Advisory Committees were needed, when the industry in question was important to the Area concerned, to make sure that national policy was implemented and to feedback to national level any developments and information of importance. A special Bulletin containing a review of developments within the unions culled from union journals was also proposed. Industrial advisories were regarded by the TUC as the mechanism for external Communist intervention in the life of the unions. They reached a pitch of notoriety in the ballot-rigging scandal which beset the ETU in the late 1950s, as we shall see below.

### **AIMS AND ETHOS**

The Party's aims, broadly speaking, were expressed in 1953 as victory of the working class at home; victory of the national independence campaigns in the colonies; and victory of socialism (in Eastern Europe) and of the advance to communism (in the USSR). Its tactical priorities in the 1950s included the peace campaign for a Five-Power Peace Pact; the campaign for British independence from the USA; the struggle for colonial independence; the campaigns for friendship and trade with the USSR, China and the People's Democracies; and for 'unity of the labour movement' – which above all meant a lifting of the 'bans and proscriptions' which obstructed the Communists from forming alliances with members of the Labour Party and entering that party as an affiliated organisation.<sup>84</sup>

The Party was an organisation composed of people who seemed to like and admire one another. The Party member was expected to be disciplined, sober, responsible and respectable. The public image of Lenin – the revered model Communist – was that of a serious man in shirt and tie, in many ways an ascetic focused on work. Communists were similarly leaders, members of a self-educated elite committed to hard work for the cause. The Party was in many ways an egalitarian community, free of many of the class prejudices and snobbery which characterised British society. Membership conferred 'a complete social identity ... one which transcended the limits of class, gender and nationality'<sup>85</sup> To be a Communist, according to Raphael Samuel, was to inhabit a self-contained 'private world' for many purposes.<sup>86</sup> But it was an identity and a private world which also drew from, and was at home

in, the national culture of the 1950s. Conformity and deference to patriarchal authority were, as Samuel points out, by no means the monopoly of the Communists. The larger political world exhibited evidence of repressed doubts, an insistence on 'collective responsibility', an intolerance of dissent, and a government of oligarchies, political machines, bloc votes, secrecy, back-room deals and political bosses with the power to punish and patronise. One of the reasons why leaving the Party was evidently so difficult was that the members did not expect to find a comparably attractive milieu anywhere else in British politics. If you wanted to mix with socialists dedicated to 'fighting' for socialism, the Communist Party was the place to be. While Pelling stressed the 'remarkable degree' to which its members were 'of non-English origin' – a view which catered to the Cold War idea that Communists had to be oddballs in one way or another – the first sociological study of the Party found them to be remarkably representative types from the history of working-class radicalism.<sup>87</sup> There is plenty of evidence, nevertheless, that they liked to think of themselves as an elite with special qualities of discipline, knowledge and even a military toughness. It was a Leninist party that had evolved under Stalin's leadership, after all. Even after the Khruschev revelations of 1956 the Executive insisted on describing Stalin as 'an outstanding Marxist leader' who had admittedly made 'serious mistakes' but only 'within the framework of colossal Soviet advances in every field'.<sup>88</sup> As important as its defence of Stalin was the EC's refusal to admit anything more damning than 'mistakes [made] in good faith' in relation to its own part in supporting the Stalinist repression in Eastern Europe, the Soviet campaign against Yugoslavia and the destruction of innumerable citizens of the Soviet Union. When Pollitt, Gollan and Bert Ramelson met with Khruschev, Pospelov and Ponomarev in Moscow in July 1956 they did so, officially at least, not to convey their disgust and abhorrence but in order to promote 'contacts among the Marxist working-class parties to preserve and consolidate their ideological unity and fraternal international solidarity'.

But the shocked reaction of such a large proportion of the membership to Khruschev's 'secret speech' shows that the Party membership was animated by more than a desire to be a useful instrument of the Soviet Union. The Executive itself was disturbed by the detail which emerged with the publication of Khruschev's full report.<sup>89</sup> By November 1956, in the wake of the invasion of Hungary, its members were in turmoil and the leadership itself was divided.<sup>90</sup> At the meeting of the Executive on 15-16 December 1956 Howard Hill described the use of the Red Army in Hungary as a 'violation of [the] Marxist principle' of national self-determination and 'a fatal blow' to the credibility of the Party's *British Road to Socialism*. When Dutt urged 'don't let us tear ourselves to pieces over Hungary', Hill replied that Dutt should not even be in the leadership of the Party, such had been Dutt's role in

the crisis as an apologist for the indefensible. Malcolm MacEwen reported to the same meeting that there had been 'a revolt by large sections of the membership' at the *Daily Worker* who were no longer prepared to work with unflinching Stalinists such as Mick Bennett, George Matthews and Allen Hutt. He referred to Khruschev's 'criminal stupidity' in cutting the ground from under the feet of the People's Democracies and wanted to know how 'fascism' could reappear in Hungary, as alleged, eleven years after its military defeat. He thought they were witnessing the 'undeniable upsurge of a whole people' and demanded that the *Daily Worker* open its pages to criticism of Soviet foreign policies. Brian Behan agreed, arguing that the People's Democracies had been created as states that were friendly towards the Soviet Union, not representative of their own people. Charlie Brewster supported the call to 'condemn the use of Soviet troops' and wanted the Party to demand 'their rapid withdrawal'. George McDougal took the same view while Phil Bolsover expressed doubts about the 'theory' that the Hungarian events represented a counter-revolution orchestrated from abroad, on the grounds that the Hungarian people were not a stage army that could be manipulated at will by foreigners. Arnold Kettle wanted the Party to dissociate itself from the Soviet action and argued that it was not in the nature of socialism that it could be defended by the armed intervention of Soviet troops. Gordon McLennan also expressed doubts but, like Kettle, agreed to support the public stand taken by the Party.

So did most of the other doubters. Publicly a united EC argued that 'fascist and counter-revolutionary forces' were seeking to restore capitalism in Hungary and had been able to mount the uprising because of an unfortunate combination of factors – external interference, the weakness of the Hungarian working class and the weight of the Catholic peasantry, the embryonic state of Hungarian socialism and errors made by the Hungarian Communists which had contributed to 'genuine popular grievances'. Gollan's report to this effect – which even tried to depict Hungary and Suez as 'two parts of the combined offensive of reaction' – was adopted 'unanimously' just a week after the stormy debate described in the previous paragraph.<sup>91</sup> Part of the explanation for the public show of unity (of all those who did not resign from the Party) must be the horror which Communists felt about anything that could weaken the Party, including public demonstrations of disagreement. It was instilled into them that without discipline the Party was lost, surrounded by enemies only too glad to assist in its destruction. Most of those who had proved their loyalty over the years, to the extent required to enter the leadership, clearly drank deeply from this doctrinal draught. But there were those who saw that the 'iron discipline of Lenin's time' was redundant in 1950s Britain and 'unobtainable' in a mass party of the sort the CP must become in order to live up to the perspectives of its own programme.<sup>92</sup> The views of this

group, articulated on the only occasion when a debate on inner-party democracy was sanctioned by the leadership, are important in illuminating how the organisation actually worked as well as to demonstrate the different hopes and motivations of members.

'Monolithic unity', according to some dissidents, had become a 'fetter on development'. It precluded real democracy in the party and its press but it also prevented the organisation from making a wider impact.<sup>93</sup> Jim Fyrth, a member of the Historians' Group, developed this criticism further than most by arguing that the Party could not fulfil the goals it had set itself since 1951 unless 'the form of organisation ... is adopted in the British party ... that makes greater unity with the rest of the Labour Movement possible ... based on the traditions and experience of the British as well as the international working class movement.'<sup>94</sup> Ted Bramley put much the same point.<sup>95</sup> He argued that the Party's actual mode of operation was alien to British trade unionists. The leadership of the Party was more influenced by the USSR than by its own rank and file or the British working class. The upshot was that there was no real debate within the Party other than that orchestrated by the leadership. The collective view of the leadership was placed before the national congress in such a way that that the discussion became a question of accepting or rejecting the Executive's position. Miniature versions of this procedure characterised District congresses. Everything was structured to eliminate the possibility of rejection. Cadres policy for staffing official positions, according to Fyrth, 'means that in fact officials are chosen by higher bodies'. Fyrth pointed out that it was little wonder that the full-time officials look on themselves as 'representatives of the higher bodies with the duty of fighting for their line' – their very position depended on leadership patronage. Meanwhile the membership was virtually atomised by the manifold impediments to sustained discussion between branches. Even some of those who saw 'nothing wrong with democratic centralism', such as Maurice Dobb,<sup>96</sup> wanted to permit such 'horizontal' communication by allowing the publication and dissemination of minority viewpoints within the Party. Edward Thompson argued for a Party press that would permit channels of reader influence and opinion, including publication of resolutions and statements. He also insisted that specialist publications – concerned with economic theory, cultural matters, historical issues and the like – 'should be absolutely free of restriction'.<sup>97</sup> Ronald Meek<sup>98</sup> took the same view, but even Thompson saw this question 'not as an abstract right but something to be judged in the political context', allowing that in conditions of repression it would be necessary to 'submerge all disagreements in the face of attack from without'.

The trouble was that many members acted as if attack from without was a permanent condition – and this was a mentality which the leadership cultivated. The dissident minority, meanwhile, was inevitably

divided and some of its members continued to believe in the utility of a Leninist vanguard party. The leadership had set up the enquiry into democratic centralism in such a way as to ensure its vindication. The 45 pages of resolutions from branches which were compiled for the 25th (Special) Congress in 1957 contained many specific proposals and numerous appeals for constitutional changes that would democratise the organisation. But the 92 branches concerned never had the chance to co-ordinate and consolidate a conference platform. The 438 amendments to Party rules that were proposed pointed in various directions and made no significant difference to the way the organisation subsequently behaved.<sup>99</sup> Gallacher, in his presidential address to congress in 1957, was impatient to clear up 'all doubts and difficulties', lamenting that 'some on whom we placed our faith, have fallen by the way'. 'We are engaged in a war [he reminded the delegates] – the Class War – the greatest war of all time. The enemy is always there – the enemy is always active and it would be a betrayal of the working class to encourage diversions that could weaken or disrupt the front of the political vanguard'.<sup>100</sup> This was the doctrine that had been handed down to Gallacher, Pollitt and Dutt by Lenin thirty-seven years earlier when Communist Parties were being created to succeed to political power in an epoch of 'wars, civil wars, and revolutions'. Much had changed since then but the intransigent mentality Lenin appealed to survived as did the spirit of 'unconditional defence' of the Soviet state which Lenin had demanded in 1919. 'It is as true today as it was when Lenin first said it [asserted Gallacher]: From now on, the test of one who claims to be a socialist, will be his attitude to the Soviet Union'.<sup>101</sup> The crisis of 1956 had brought this and the related question of the purposes of the Party into question. The loyalists were confronted with Party members who could no longer see the need for a Communist Party and no longer believed in the Soviet Union. But there were many who wanted a different sort of Marxist organisation – more democratic, more pluralistic and more concerned with its relevance to Britain. The congress of 1957 was the designated occasion for overcoming all of these critics – because all the dissidents were lumped together in the eyes of the leadership as people who belittled and undermined the Party. They had to be defeated so that it could re-emerge as a united force.

The Executive insisted that the Party's vanguard role was not 'sectarian boasting – but a sober fact, because our approach is based on Marxism, and we are an organised force, a Party of a new type'.<sup>102</sup> Gollan reminded the delegates to the 25th congress of this fact. When it came to the crunch, the taking of political power 'could only be achieved by mass struggles led by a party based on democratic centralism and Marxism-Leninism'. By contrast the Labour left was perceived as an amorphous and strategically short-sighted collection of individuals who could only become effective with the Communists holding the reins. All Party members broadly subscribed to these 'doctrines. Why

else would militant socialists join such a small group? It was their perception that its combative, activist style and its unity of purpose – informed by a special insight into the workings of the capitalist system – gave it a special role. The Party, its members believed, formulated its policy ‘on the basis of the needs and interests of the working class’. Its policy became the will of the people through the organised work of the Party in the class struggle. Though the Communists refined their programme, the *British Road to Socialism* in 1956-7, they continued to believe that ‘as the class struggle develops ... the capitalists more and more centralise their forces ... and develop a powerful, centralised state machine which confronts the working class with all the resources of capitalism’. In order to defeat this highly centralised class enemy, the Executive asserted in 1957, ‘history has proved that it is necessary to develop the Communist Party.’ And the Communist Party, it continued, ‘must be unified under a single leading centre’ so that the active militants came under the direction of the leadership cadre.<sup>103</sup>

## NOTES

1. I give examples of the continuing deference to Soviet leadership during the 1950s in *Rajani Palme Dutt*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1993.
2. CP/CENT/ORG/2/6. Fifty in Scotland, 23 Lancashire, 57 London, 7 Yorkshire, 9 Midlands, 9 Wales, 8 East Midlands, 3 South Essex, 5 North East, and 17 elsewhere.
3. Among the other important leaders of this generation are Andrew Rothstein and Robin Page Arnott.
4. Max Morris, for example, was ‘disgusted’ by Dutt’s performance at the special congress of 1957 when he successfully moved an amendment to a section of the Party programme against the wishes of the Executive. Dutt had defended the passage dealing with a ‘fraternal association’ of the member states of the Commonwealth, when it had been introduced to the Party programme on Stalin’s authority in 1951. EC meeting 11-12 May 1957, CP/CENT/EC/04/08.
5. Syd Abbott and Sol Gadian were the principal adversaries. Abbott had a reputation for verbal asperity but it was Gadian who was relieved of his responsibilities in 1958. The Executive saw the danger of a ‘fraction’ developing in the Manchester Area and censured all of its leading members. Members of the EC were then co-opted on to the leading bodies in Lancashire. Gadian and Wilf Charles refused to accept this settlement and many Manchester Area people supported them. Gadian, Charles and Max Druck resigned from the District Committee. Frances Dean also resigned as East Lancashire Area Organiser. Meanwhile Syd Abbott’s health collapsed and a stroke followed leaving the third largest District of the Party without a District Organiser.

The problems of this District were also under inspection in 1958 when Syd Abbott was found to be ‘terribly careless in accounting’ and criticised for his poor handling of cadres. Sol Gadian was described as politically lazy, shrinking from public activity. Gadian and Frances Dean were reportedly already unable to work with Abbott. Report from John

Williamson to Gollan and Bill Lauchlan, 20 February 1958 in CP/CENT/ORG/6/4. Though Abbott was accused of having a 'poor cadres policy' by Cannon in 1954 (see L. Black, MA dissertation, Warwick University, pp49-50) he was evidently protected by the Executive on which he was a long-standing member. It is only fair to add that Cannon, according to Eric Heffer, was 'a very arrogant man' who did not get on with the Liverpool ETU members that Heffer was familiar with in the late 1940s. Even then he was complaining about members of the Lancashire and Cheshire District of the CP. See, E. Heffer, *Never a Yes Man*, London, Verso, 1991, p58.

6. See the file CP/CENT/ORG/2/3 containing individual contributions put before the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy.
7. See F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, Penguin, London 1975.
8. Report from the Lancashire and Cheshire District 1951, CP/CENT/ORG/1/6. See also the reports on leaks and infiltration in CP/CENT/ORG/1/10.
9. CP/CENT/CONG/08/03.
10. Ted Bramley, 9 January 1957, evidence submitted to the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy, CP/CENT/ORG/2/3.
11. Correspondence to Pollitt in preparation for the 22nd Congress 1952 from Idris Cox, Ted Dicken, Abe Moffatt, Bert Papworth, Jim Gardner, Tamara Rust, William Lauchlan, Finlay Hart, and George Thomson, CP/CENT/ORG/CONG/08/03.
12. 'The Sixth Five-Year Plan', 20 January 1956, CP/CENT/SPN/1/13.
13. F. Beckett, *Enemy Within*, p147. Beckett says that the loss of a secret 'Commercial Branch' consisting of around 50 businessmen who wanted to keep their Communist sympathies concealed was one of the effects of 1956. The branch was apparently established in the mid-30s and was co-ordinated by Reuben Falber.
14. See 'New Findings from the Moscow Archives' in *Socialist History*, 10, Pluto Press, London 1996, pp84-91.
15. See J. E. Haynes and H. Klehr, 'Moscow Gold Confirmed at Last?', *Labour History*, 33, 2, 1992, pp279-93.
16. P. Anderson and K. Davey, *Moscow Gold?* Supplement of the *New Statesman*, 7 April 1995.
17. Similarly, the costs of Dutt's 'independent' journal, *Labour Monthly*, founded in July 1921 in response to an idea of Lenin's, were probably met by Moscow. See J. Callaghan, *Rajani Palme Dutt*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1993, pp43-5.
18. Reuben Falber admitted these details in the CP paper *Changes* on 15 November 1991 after *Sunday Times* journalists found evidence in Moscow.
19. Klugmann's notes on the extended EC of 3 November 1956, CP/CENT/EC/04/01.
20. Dutt's papers are held by the British Library and are catalogued CUP 1262 K1-6. The quoted letter is in K4 volume 1953-4 and dated 1 March 1956. See my *Rajani Palme Dutt*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1993, pp250-5 and 256-9.
21. By 1956 the NUSC had begun to function on a once per term basis with about twelve members but it was hobbled by the events of that year and

- limped along until 1960. An account is given by a leading participant in R. Russell, *They Think I Lost, I Think I Won*, unpublished autobiography, 1995.
22. M. Jenkins, *Bevanism: Labour's High Tide*, Spokesman, Nottingham 1979, p127.
  23. F. Watters, *Being Frank: The Memoirs of Frank Watters*, Askew Design and Print, Doncaster, 1992, p13.
  24. CP/CENT/ORG/1/6.
  25. 'Cadres Policy', 7 June 1956, CP/CENT/ORG/1/4.
  26. K. Beauchamp, 'Publications Issued in London', and undated letter to Betty Reid in CP/CENT/ORG/1/4.
  27. Correspondence of Kitson to Pollitt, 5 March 1952, CP/CENT/CONG/08/05.
  28. CP/CENT/ORG/1/6.
  29. Ibid.
  30. The London figures are simply missing from the relevant table.
  31. See chapter 8.
  32. CP/CENT/ORG/9/1.
  33. Quoted in L. Black, MA dissertation, University of Warwick, p42.
  34. B. Reid, *World News and Views*, 32, pp126-7.
  35. This is why dissidents normally left the organisation as individuals - they were not aware of one another as dissidents.
  36. See H. Adi, 'West Africans and the Communist Party in the 1950s', in G. Andrews et al (eds.), *Opening the Books*, Pluto, London 1995.
  37. A. Flinn, 'The CPGB and the National Branches. Cypriot, Indian, and West Indian branches 1945-70: an experiment in self-organisation?', CPGB Biographical Project Conference, April 2001.
  38. M. MacEwan, *The Greening of a Red*, Pluto, London 1991, p158.
  39. The rest of the paragraph is based on a survey of cadre work conducted in 1950-51, CP/CENT/ORG/1/6.
  40. R. Brunt and C. Rowan (eds.), *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1982, p90.
  41. E. Ludmer, 'Forty-six women spread their wings', *World News*, 17 May 1958, p319.
  42. R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, p111.
  43. The 500 never materialised according to Monty Johnstone.
  44. 'Some Notes about the ULR from Comrade Eric Hobsbaum (sic)', 10-11 May 1958, CP/CENT/EC/05/08.
  45. 'The Communist Party and Young People', prepared for the EC 13 September 1958, CP/CENT/EC/05/10.
  46. The claimed circulation of *Challenge* was 7,000 but it is difficult to believe that they were all purchased by young people.
  47. *Daily Worker*, 14 January 1956.
  48. An untitled document dated 8 October 1958 in CP/CENT/EC/05/10.
  49. See P. Cohen (ed.), *Children of the Revolution*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997; an American memoir revealing similar stories is J. Kaplan and L. Schapiro (eds.), *Red Diapers: Growing Up in the Communist Left*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1998. The CPUSA's elaborate attempts to cater for the children of Party members is the subject

- of P. C. Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States*, Columbia University Press, New York 1999.
50. Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, p54.
  51. Reid was on the Executive's sub-committee on youth in 1958.
  52. 'Literature Report to Central Organisation Committee', CP/CENT/ORG/2/2.
  53. Which in 1951 was reported to be governed by 'a purely business approach'.
  54. 'Party Education Programme for 1953-54', *Communist Review*, October 1953, pp301-09.
  55. The meeting was held on 10 December 1956.
  56. 'Proposals for a New Theoretical Journal', CP/CENT/EC/04/07.
  57. Executive Committee meeting 12-13 March 1960, CP/CENT/EC/07/01.
  58. 'Education Plan – School Year 1960-61', CP/CENT/EC/07/03.
  59. One reliable account stated that '... the *Daily Worker* has built up a staff of some of the ablest newspapermen in Fleet Street together with men whose experience has been formed ... in the factories, workshops and mines'. E. P. Thompson, *The Struggle for a Free Press*, People's Press, London, April 1952, p21.
  60. See K. Morgan, 'The CP and the *Daily Worker*, 1930-56', in G. Andrews, et al. (eds.), *Opening the Books*, Pluto, London 1995, p150.
  61. B. Behan, *With Breast Expanded*, MacGibbon and Kee, London 1964, p134.
  62. *Ibid*, p153.
  63. EC meeting July 1956, CP/CENT/EC/03/25.
  64. 'Report to the Political Committee', October 1952, CP/CENT/ORG/6/4.
  65. She was released from the Federal Penitentiary in Alderson, West Vancouver, on October 23, 1955 after serving one year and one day under the Smith Act for her political ideas. During her imprisonment she was ordered to be deported under the McCarran Act as a foreign-born Communist – the same basis for deporting John Williamson. She arrived at Southampton by QE on 15 December in very poor health.
  66. Munzenberg organised campaigns for the Comintern in the inter-war years and mastered the art of maximising their impact on the non-Communist left.
  67. V. Feather, *How Do The Communists Work?*, Blatchworth Press, London 1953, p29.
  68. See C. Barnett, *The Verdict of Peace*, Macmillan, London 2001, p180.
  69. See B. Crozier, 'Britain's Industrial Revolutionaries', *Interplay*, 4, 1, January 1971 and B. Crozier (ed.), *We Will Bury You: Studies in Left-wing Subversion Today*, Tom Stacey, London 1970, p18.
  70. *World News*, 33, 9, 28 February 1953.
  71. V. Feather, *The Essence of Trade Unionism*, Bodley Head, Oxford 1963, p37 and p39. Feather was still warning of the dangers for any union which allows itself to be dominated by members of a political party operating as a clique or faction.
  72. 'The Trade Union Movement and Communism', draft TUC memo by VT/AMM prepared for the General Council, 24 November 1948, CP/CENT/IND/12/06.

73. The *Observer*, 26 June 1966 was one of the newspapers which found Communist organisation behind the strike both in the NUS and in the docks. It claimed that the CP strategy failed only because it proved impossible to sustain sympathy strikes designed to paralyse the ports.
74. CP/CENT/ORG/2/1.
75. P. Kerrigan, 'The Communist Party in the Industrial Struggle', *Marxism Today*, December 1970, p375.
76. See *Formation and Work of Factory Groups* (London, CPGB, nd - probably 1924) and *Handbook on Local Organisation* (London, CPGB, January 1927). CP/CENT/ORG/2/1.
77. This was Sid French's view as expressed at the Party's 30th congress in 1967.
78. *Build the Factory and Pit Branches*, CPGB Organisation Department, June 1958, *ibid*.
79. Source CP/CENT/ORG/2/1.
80. See CP/CENT/IND/1/2.
81. See CP/CENT/IND/1/2.
82. B. Bradley, 'Advisory Committees', CP/CENT/ORG/2/1.
83. In a document entitled, 'Industrial Advisory Committees'.
84. 'EC Statement', CP/CENT/EC/03/03.
85. R. Samuel, 'The Lost World of British Communism', *New Left Review*, 154 November-December 1985, p11.
86. *Ibid.* p11. Part two of this is in number 156 March-April 1986, pp63-114.
87. H. Pelling, *The British Communist Party: A Historical Profile*, London, 1958, p15: K. Newton, *The Sociology of British Communism*, Penguin, London 1969.
88. From the resolution of the EC of 13 May 1956, 'Lessons of the 29th Congress of the CPSU'.
89. 'Draft Report to EC', 14/15 July 1956, CP/CENT/EC/03/25.
90. The rest of the paragraph is based on James Klugmann's notes of the extended meeting of the Executive Committee which met on 3 November 1956, CP/CENT/EC/04/01.
91. 'Draft Resolution on Hungary' in *ibid.* EC meeting of 10 November 1956 documented in CP/CENT/EC/04/02.
92. 'Minority Report of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy', CP/CENT/EC/04/04.
93. Evidence of West Hampstead branch submitted on 25 November 1956 to the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy, CP/CENT/ORG/2/3.
94. Jim Fyrth, correspondence of 7 December 1956 to Commission on Inner-Party Democracy, CP/CENT/ORG/2/3.
95. Ted Bramley, correspondence of 9 January 1957, *ibid.*
96. Correspondence contained in *ibid.*
97. *Ibid.*
98. *Ibid.*
99. 'Amendments to Rules for the 25th (Special) Congress, Easter 1957, CP/CENT/EC/04/04.
100. 'Presidential Address to Congress', 6 April 1957, CP/CENT/EC/04/07.
101. *Ibid.* p3.
102. 'Draft Outline for Political Report to Congress', 6-7 April 1957, p3.
103. 'Draft Notes for Reports on Inner Party Democracy', prepared for EC, 6 April 1957, CP/CENT/EC/04/07.

## 2. Crisis

The Conservatives entered office in 1951 on the slogan 'Set the People Free', firmly associating the outgoing Labour Government with the prevailing material shortages and restrictions. By the end of the decade they were still in power and widely believed to have profited because Harold Macmillan's remark – 'you've never had it so good' – said something profound about Britain and the diminishing prospects of the socialists who stood in futile opposition to its dominant trends. At first glance this period of sustained economic growth and full employment was obviously not a congenial time for the British Communist Party. It was not only beset by the prevailing *zeitgeist* of post-ideological consensus in Britain, but marginalised by the all-pervasive Cold War and ruthlessly exposed as the willing dupe of the Russians by the events of 1956. We will see in due course that this picture is a simplification. Much of the world continued to see the Communist bloc as a source of hope. The European empires were in the final stages of collapse and talk of socialist advance accompanied decolonisation from British Guiana to Vietnam. Britain itself remained a deeply divided, if remarkably complacent class society, its economy in relative decline, its colonies subject to a metropolitan rearguard action that was often clumsy and brutal. The Labour Party was bitterly divided and the trade unions were increasingly blamed for Britain's diminishing competitiveness in world markets. Sustained full employment, moreover, strengthened the unions and particularly the rank and file organisations upon which the Communists proposed to build. Many of the values and ideas that the Communists subscribed to also figured in the beliefs of Labour and trade union activists. For all these reasons, the Party was not the hopeless, isolated and lifeless thing that its detractors would have wished.

### THE SOVIET COMPLEX

But there is no denying that immense problems were closing in around it. The greatest of these was related to its culture of dependency upon the Soviet Union. In Communist propaganda the Soviet Union was tantamount to a socialist utopia. No public criticism was ever used

against it by the British Party. While people of all other political persuasions could be found who understood that Stalin's dictatorship originated in state terror and was maintained by the same methods, Communists resolutely denied the evidence. A Great Fear of the Soviet Union existed in any case by the end of the 1940s. It was partly orchestrated by Western elites, particularly the governments of Britain and the USA, but the fear of Communism and the associated military threat of the Soviet Union was only made possible by the brutal actions sponsored or undertaken directly by the Russians in Eastern Europe, where one-party states were created on the Soviet model after 1947. More and more people were becoming familiar with the idea of a totalitarian menace spreading out into Europe and China. A war had just been fought to destroy its fascist version but the character of its Stalinist variant was becoming well-known to millions of Europeans in the immediate aftermath of the wartime alliance. From 1949 this menacing totalitarian regime was equipped with nuclear bombs and ready to use them, or so its growing reputation for ruthlessness suggested.

To the testimonies of prominent former Communists such as Arthur Koestler, who were lauded by the press and politicians, were added the eloquent indictments of Soviet power supplied by the Stalin dictatorship itself, as it crushed all opponents who fell within its reach. Even within the British Communist Party a degree of unease had existed since the 1930s, as Rajani Palme Dutt acknowledged during the bitter central committee meetings of September 1939 when he referred to those elements in the organisation who saw the Soviet Union as a self-interested state pursuing its own interests rather than those of the world Communist movement. These 'anti-Soviet tendencies', according to Dutt, had manifested themselves 'already from the time of the trials' – the notorious Moscow Trials of 1936-8 when prominent Communists were indicted for treason and collusion with the fascist states.<sup>1</sup> There was no public evidence of the discontent Dutt referred to. Party membership grew in this period and the organisation adamantly rejected the idea that Stalin had staged show trials.<sup>2</sup> However, evidence of both the CPSU's disregard for other Communist Parties and Stalin's tendency to murder prominent Communists was already abundant in the 1930s and continued to accumulate after 1945.<sup>3</sup> In June 1948 Tito's Yugoslavia – less than twelve months earlier the spearhead of Stalin's anti-American campaign – joined the list of the Soviet Union's enemies.

Mervyn Jones tells us that as one 'difficult situation' succeeded another during these post-war years, the version of events advanced by the Party made less and less sense to the unconverted. The 'greatest shock' was the obloquy heaped on Tito after June 1948. When the leader of a Communist state with undoubted popular support was accused by Stalin of being a fascist spy, according to Jones, 'The most docile followers of the Party line had to strain hard to swallow the

accusation'.<sup>4</sup> But there was little visible evidence of their discomfiture. Apart from the defections of one or two Communists with a story to tell – such as the high profile Cold War defectors Hyde and Darke – there was nothing outwardly suggestive of discontent within the ranks.<sup>5</sup> Doris Lessing tells us that she actually joined the British Communist Party, in 1949-50, 'at a time when my "doubts" had become something like a steady, private torment'.<sup>6</sup> But for the next six years she would represent the Party at various international congresses of writers. The truth is, as Alison Macleod recalls, Party members such as herself, whatever misgivings they privately harboured, subscribed to a Marxism that continued to give meaning to their lives and the world they lived in.<sup>7</sup> In the face of criticism from the outside world they might feel as Olive Budden did, as expressed in a letter to Pollitt:

They make me sick. And I want to shout from the housetops that there's nothing like the Communist Party, that as a foundation member, that is for thirty-odd years, it has given a feeling of being satisfied, of having wonderful opportunities for development, of a great movement of which you are an integral part, of fellowship, in particular with your fellow members, but also with mankind, 'all progressive mankind'; that you have an outlook which illuminates everything. And these critics think they have minds above all this because they imagine they can develop their precious 'individuality' by muttering amongst themselves in corners.<sup>8</sup>

For these people the Marxist belief system was synonymous with belonging to the Party; and belonging to the Party involved supporting the Soviet Union and upholding its leader's view of things. Doubts were confined to one's innermost thoughts, but if they were expressed within the Party they were quickly stamped upon. Macleod remembers the 'quarrel' between Stalin and Tito being 'hotly debated' in the offices of the *Daily Worker* but the debate took place within narrow terms of reference; only Frank Lesser was 'insufficiently convinced of Tito's vileness' to the point of leaving the Party, and he did so by going quietly in another context.

Self-censorship seems to have had much to do with this. Eleanor and Michael Barratt Brown admitted in 1956 that they could not plead misinformation over the case of Yugoslavia. 'We had much evidence that was at variance with the statements of the Cominform resolutions', they acknowledged. They were aware of at least some of the injustices committed against the defendants in the trials of 'Titoites' in Eastern Europe. But 'we kept the very real doubts that we did feel about these matters for private discussion in our own home, and did not raise them in the Party out of a general desire to conform to the Party line...and out of some fear of being accused of deviation'. The Barratt Browns – while most participants in the Party debate of 1956

blamed each other – allowed that they had ‘been guilty of developing a certain moral apathy towards the suppression of opposition and towards the trial, imprisonment and execution of opponents in socialist countries’.<sup>9</sup> This was a rare admission even in the context of the discussion opened by publication of Khruschev’s ‘secret’ speech. But when the Barratt Browns admitted their ‘adulation of Stalin’ and their uncritical acceptance of Soviet statements as the last word of truth, we can be pretty sure that this mentality pervaded the whole organisation.

Pollitt and the Party leadership condemned Tito the instant he fell foul of Stalin; they did not even pretend to know the explanation for Tito’s alleged apostasy. Stalin’s authority was evidence enough.<sup>10</sup> During the prolonged purge of so-called ‘Titoites’ throughout eastern Europe in 1949–52, complete with show trials and executions, the *Daily Worker* under J. R. Campbell’s editorship faithfully reproduced the Stalinist line and actively sought to refute criticisms raised in the ‘bourgeois press’, such as the allegations of anti-Semitism in Stalin’s choice of high-ranking victims from the east European Communist Parties.<sup>11</sup> Some of the victims were personal friends of British Communists such as Otto Sling, whom Gollan knew well.<sup>12</sup> Others were of such high standing in the movement that they must have been thought of as friends. The General Secretary of the Czech Communist Party, Rudolf Slansky, for example, was a man of impeccable Communist credentials – a Party member since the age of 23, active in the Ukrainian partisan war during the Second World War and the Slovak uprising against the Nazis in 1944. Yet Slansky was found guilty of working for the fascists in November 1952 and shot, along with fellow defendants Otto Sling, Josef Frank, Karel Schwab, Vladimir Clementis, Bedrich Geminder and Ludwig Frejka. By then it was a familiar cycle; Laszlo Rajk and other Hungarian Communist leaders had been tried and executed in September 1949, Kostov and other prominent Bulgarian Communists had met the same fate in December of that year. According to Adam Westoby, summing up the evidence provided by these years, ‘It is estimated that around 2.5 million people – something over a quarter of the total membership – were expelled from the Communist Parties of eastern Europe, and that between 125,000 and 250,000 were imprisoned. In addition, the leadership of every party was hit’.<sup>13</sup>

Though the charges against the accused were incredible and the convictions secured only on the basis of confessions (obtained after torture<sup>14</sup>), British Communists vouched for their veracity. Derek Kartun’s *Tito’s Plot Against Europe* (1949), which was composed in Budapest while the author covered Rajk’s trial, is a case in point. James Klugmann, among other things the Party’s expert on Yugoslavia and an enthusiast for Tito up to the latter’s excommunication from the Cominform, contributed *From Trotsky to Tito* (1951) to show the many links of corruption which enabled bourgeois nationalists,

Zionists, Trotskyists, fascists and agents of foreign intelligence services to infiltrate the Communist parties of the People's Democracies. It was a story he was re-telling in the month of Stalin's death, in an attempt to justify the barbarous trial and execution of Rudolf Slansky in Prague.<sup>15</sup> Other Communists depicted Tito's Yugoslavia as 'America's cheapest ally', 'backed to the hilt by the American bankers and brass-hats', a country that had slipped from 'bourgeois nationalism' to 'a fascist type police regime' resting on kulaks and capitalists.<sup>16</sup> 'Titoites' all over Eastern Europe were allegedly working for the same ends within the Communist Parties. At the same time, the People's Democracies were extolled by British Communists as exemplars of the transition to socialism that Britain would do well to emulate.

Stalin's death in March 1953 forestalled an even greater purge and provided the international Communist movement with an opportunity to show its devotion to the dead dictator. The *Daily Worker* lamented the passing of 'the greatest working-class leader, genius and creative thinker that the world has ever known', but was still outshone by Dutt in *Labour Monthly* who referred to Stalin as 'the architect of the rising world of free humanity' who had bequeathed a peerless legacy in the shape of 'the invincible array of states and peoples who have thrown off the bonds of the exploiters'.<sup>17</sup> Soon after these obsequies an uprising of workers in the German Democratic Republic, spreading from Berlin to most of the major cities in June, was suppressed by Russian troops. Among other demands, the demonstrators had called for free elections, but many were killed and thousands jailed as the dictatorship took control. Here was yet more evidence that there was something rotten in the People's Democracies. The arrest (June) and summary execution (December) of Stalin's head of political police, Lavrenti Beria, was another striking sign that something was amiss. Gollan and Pollitt attended the 19th congress of the CPSU as fraternal delegates in October 1952 and in Gollan's report on that congress Beria was praised for his analysis of the equality of Soviet nationalities. Gollan may not have noticed that *Pravda*, in exposing Beria as 'an enemy of the people' in July 1953, specifically referred to his criminal sowing of discord among these same peoples; but he could not have failed to register Beria's execution.<sup>18</sup> Did Gollan and his comrades wonder why a supposedly advanced society killed people whenever the government changed personnel? They may well have done but they did not publicly admit their concern about such summary executions until the Political Committee belatedly issued a statement on 'Khruschev's Report' in July 1956.<sup>19</sup>

Jones has argued that 'paradoxically, the weakness and isolation of the Party, which in hard-headed judgement made it pointless to stay in, also made it difficult to leave. In a real sense, the Party was held together by the ferocity of the cold war, the pressure of enemies on every side, the incessant onslaughts on the Soviet Union and

Communism in the press and in speeches by both Tory and Labour politicians – onslaughts which included some home truths, but also a torrent of distortions and slanders. It seemed cowardly, and even indecent, to withdraw'.<sup>20</sup> Doris Lessing, looking back on these years, argued that 'it is truly impossible to re-create the snarling, hating atmosphere of the Cold War'. But she also observed that 'one of the reasons some found it hard to leave the Party was precisely because there were so many colourful, extraordinary people in it. Good people, generous, kind, clever'.<sup>21</sup> If 'the most sensitive, compassionate, socially concerned people...became communists', as she says they did all over Europe, there is obviously even more of a problem explaining why 'these decent, kind people supported the worst, the most brutal tyranny of our time'.<sup>22</sup> One reason was that they not only hated capitalism, which they held responsible for all of the remediable ills of the world, but they also believed it to be doomed and destined to be replaced by socialism – this is the gist of what Lessing herself said in 1956.<sup>23</sup> They constantly gave the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt because it was building socialism in a world that had always contained powerful hostile states intent on crippling it. Many of the defects of the Soviet system could be explained away by reference to this situation. The ills of capitalism were systemic and permanent, the ills of socialism were transitional and temporary and very often the consequences of privations imposed upon Russia by its enemies.

Pollitt and other leaders of the Party who made repeated trips to the Soviet Union and eastern Europe received lavish hospitality and were feted as any visiting head of state might be. Some of these people were also aware of the Party's financial dependence on Moscow. But personal corruption will not do as an explanation of their fanaticism. Their deference to Soviet leaders was ideological in origin and had been routinised over the years.<sup>24</sup> The Cold War provided plenty of 'evidence' to support their ingrained conviction that the West detested the Soviet Union, not because it was a backward, repressive prison camp – as the propaganda maintained – but because it was building socialism. Pollitt's 'Weekly Letter' to members of the Executive, for example, referred to both 'the arrest of the Moscow doctors'<sup>25</sup> in January 1953 and the warnings in *Pravda* that followed, 'stressing that the greater the successes of socialism the more bitter becomes the fight of world capitalism against it'.<sup>26</sup> This Stalinist doctrine was later denounced as an ideological deviation by Khruschev in 1956 and the incident is a good example of Pollitt carelessly repeating something handed down to him from a higher authority. But Pollitt probably believed that 'recent events have demonstrated that the Americans are, in *Pravda*'s words, "sending whole armies of spies" into the People's Democracies'. Only a fortnight earlier the editor of the *Washington Post* had listed some of the known exploits of the CIA, including subversion in Costa Rica, Guatemala, Burma, Siam and Vietnam and

the channelling of subsidies to a neo-Nazi organisation 'which had marked for liquidation the leaders of the Social Democratic Party' in West Germany. That very week John Foster Dulles had talked about 'rolling back the Iron Curtain', not just containing Communism as before.<sup>27</sup>

In front-line West Germany, of the 8,774 Nazi party members who did not lose their jobs, according to the Augsburg *Volkzeitung*, 79 per cent became state officials, as did just over 60 per cent of the 23,405 Nazis who were re-employed after 1 May 1945.<sup>28</sup> This was the state that the USA and Britain were proposing to re-arm from 1950. Things that would have been regarded as hopelessly far-fetched, had they been predicted at the beginning of 1945, had become familiar banalities once the Cold War unfolded. All Communist journals predictably situated the Prague trial in this Cold War context:

Every sensible person will understand, that the \$1000 million appropriation by the American Congress for underground work in the People's Democracies is not being spent on prayers. History does not know of another example of such arrogant, brazen, and openly proclaimed espionage and sabotage work on other people's lands as that carried on by the government of the US in all countries, particularly in the People's Democracies.<sup>29</sup>

Had not the *New York Times* quoted Governor Theodore McKeldin on 27 November 1952 predicting that 'Eisenhower would abandon the policy of trying to contain Communism in favour of "incitement of rebellious acts" in nations under the Soviet heel'? Had not the *New York Herald Tribune*, on the same day, reported that 'Among firm anti-Communists and anti-Russians, the prevailing attitude as a result of the testimony [at the Prague trial] seems to be that the defendants bungled their operations and were foolish enough to get caught'? 'In other words', their Washington correspondent summed up, 'those who hope for the overthrow of the Communist regimes feel that shrewder persons are required to achieve this end'.<sup>30</sup> So while the front pages screamed about Stalinist frame-ups and forced confessions, the Communist ranks were told that the truth occasionally came out in the inside pages of the same newspapers and that the real problem was that 'the Slankys, Gemindlers and Schvabs, perfidious as they were, weren't good enough'. The enemy would now look for shrewder operators elsewhere.

### **ANTI-SEMITISM**

The idea that the purge of Titoites – that is the purge of the east European 'traitors' proposing to take the same road as 'the fascist butcher Tito' – was somehow anti-Semitic had to be answered. Though Soviet anti-Semitism was no more counter-intuitive than the idea that veteran Communists had gone over to the fascists in all the parties of

the People's Democracies, it was ridiculed as such in Party publications. 'More Jews were saved by the Soviet Union from the clutches of the Hitlerites than by all the other countries of the world put together', including a quarter of a million Polish Jews, announced a Party 'education syllabus on the Jewish Question'. Stalin had two and a half million Jews evacuated from the invaded territories and moved to the interior of the country. The evacuated Polish Jews had been offered a choice of full citizenship in the Soviet Union or proper and assisted repatriation if they preferred it.<sup>31</sup> The late Chief Rabbi of England, Dr. J. H. Hertz, had said, albeit at the height of the USSR's war popularity in 1943, that the Soviet Union had 'rendered the utmost service to humanity – and has saved the men, women and children of Palestine. If Russia had not made her immortal stand, Jews in this country would by now have been led off in "death trains"'. It was emotional manipulation to quote Hertz ten years later, and his comments bore no logical relationship to the events of 1948-52, but Communists were the last ones to forget that it was the Soviet Union that destroyed the Nazis. It was unthinkable that the Soviet leadership itself could be anti-Semitic. The Communists abhorred racism and had led the fight against it. They had persistently demanded legislation against anti-Semitism and racial slanders. Opposition to racism was part of their 'identity', as some might put it now. Communists stood opposed to the rearming of 'Nazi-infested' West Germany. They believed that the days of pogroms and anti-Semitism in Russia were long gone. The Moscow Jewish Community, numbering 250,000, was the biggest in Europe and enjoyed a rich cultural life. It was one of 300 Jewish religious communities inside the Soviet Union, all of them free from religious persecution.

In the Soviet Union the 'Jewish Question' had been solved, so far as the Communists were concerned. All the previously catalogued half-truths and sophistries, and many more besides, drew strength from this idea which itself was only part of a bigger self-delusion concerning the socialist nature of the Soviet Union:

The Jewish Question is as old as Class Society itself; in fact it has always been both a part and an expression of the division of mankind into oppressors and oppressed. The solution...will, in fact, be achieved as a part of the emancipation of man from his continual slavery by dominating and exploiting classes. That this is so is no longer confined to the theoretical convictions of advanced socialists...but is now an established fact and feature of modern history. In the Socialist Soviet Union, where the contradictions of class society have been resolved with the establishment of Socialist relations, the Jewish Question too has been solved and no longer exists in that country.<sup>32</sup>

The 'Jewish Question' was nothing other than anti-Semitism. Among those claiming that it continued to exist in the Soviet Union were the

British Board of Deputies, the World Congress of Jews, the state of Israel, and the 'Zionists generally'. These organisations were denounced by the Communists for representing 'the other side of the medal of anti-Semitism and racial discrimination'. For the Communists, Zionism 'proclaimed that the Jew, wherever he lived outside Palestine...was an alien'. Like the anti-Semites, the Zionists proclaimed that the Jewish exploiter and the Jewish exploited had more in common than they had with their fellow citizens and that Jewish minorities wherever they existed constituted a single nation. Zionism told the Jews to have nothing to do with the socialist movement, when in fact Jews had been in the vanguard of that movement in many countries since its inception.<sup>33</sup> The founders of Zionism wanted it to combat socialist ideas and, according to the Communists, Zionism served the interests of American imperialism through the state of Israel. For Andrew Rothstein, writing in 1953, 'The Zionist leaders of this and other countries have rushed into the press to attack the Soviet Union for arresting a few degenerate middle-class professional men whom thwarted class hatred of socialism (thwarted Zionism for some) has led into terrorist activities on behalf of Wall Street'.<sup>34</sup>

The Communist leaders knew that the Nazi genocidal war against Jews had produced an interest in Zionism among the Jews of many nations – the Jewish population of Palestine/Israel having risen from 600,000 in 1946 to 1,450,000 by 1953. They knew that there was disquiet among Jewish Party members because of the Soviet Union's current hostility towards the state of Israel (after having given it material support in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war) and because of Israel's public criticism of the treatment of Soviet Jews. The charges of anti-Semitism in the purges and executions of Titoites only added to the problem. This stirred debate within the Party's Jewish Committee, but for some the irreconcilable struggle against segregationist tendencies, which was Communist orthodoxy, was not helped by advocates within the Party who talked of the 'development of Jewish culture'. There was no homogenous Jewish culture in Britain, the Party orthodox insisted, and 'to speak of Jewish culture is no more scientific than to speak of "Jewish Bolshevism", so dearly beloved of the fascists'. Moreover, concentrated Jewish colonies such as existed in the East End have 'continuously tended to disperse'. To talk of safeguarding a Jewish culture sprang from the error of regarding Jews as a nation, according to this argument. The anonymous author, though acknowledging that anti-semitism affected all Jews, did not think that this in any way contradicted the duty of Communists 'to aid in every way possible the fullest assimilation of Jews, rather than to glorify seg[regationist] attempts to revive fading ghetto ideology'. Assimilated Jews had recently been murdered for being Jewish in Occupied Europe. Their murderers did not care whether they were assimilated or not. Some Communists talked as if they had forgotten this fact. In the submerged

factional debates among Jewish Party members in Britain some of the contributors argued that while 'the majority of the Jewish comrades in the party think of themselves as communists rather than as Jews and did not claim any special hearing on the Jewish problem', 'the Rabbinical faction (as for example [Lazar] Zaidman)' thought otherwise and talked as if they possessed a special insight on 'Jewish issues'.<sup>35</sup>

Some Jewish members of the CPSU were just as keen to oppose Jewish nationalism and Zionism as the anonymous member of the CPGB quoted above, though for the benefit of the fight against the Nazis, Jewish nationalism was briefly encouraged by the Soviet authorities. It was kept alive among Jews after the war by knowledge of the Nazi genocide and the emergence of Israel. This was the signal for Stalin's suppression of Jewish cultures on the grounds that the Jews had become unreliable since the formation of the state of Israel. Yiddish publications and Yiddish theatre were closed down in 1949; by 1952 'virtually all the leaders of Jewish culture were shot and it is possible that deportation of all Jews may have been in contemplation'.<sup>36</sup> The obscure debate within the CPGB's Jewish Committee summarised in the paragraph above may suggest that some Communists in Britain went some of the way, in logic at least, with Stalin. All 'segregationalist tendencies must be fought irreconcilably', it was argued, there was no such thing as Jewish culture and Jewish nationalism was a fraud. It was a short step from this to deny the Jews the right to their religion, to their own culture and their right to perpetuate, if they wished, the segregation which had been in the past forced upon them. The anonymous British Communist quoted above specifically denied this and did not see how one part of the argument led to the other. S/he was content to argue that 'the duty of a communist is to fight resolutely against such tendencies and never cease to explain their implications and results'.<sup>37</sup>

But evidence of how the fight was actually being conducted in eastern Europe continued to come to light and to the attention of Party members.<sup>38</sup> Some had had their Communist faith 'shaken' by the 'Doctor's Plot', so we can only assume that additional evidence of official anti-Semitism in the years that followed continued to corrode it.<sup>39</sup> In the course of 1954 the American Jewish Committee reported that thousands of Jews had been deported to Siberia since 1947; that 100,000 people – mostly Jews – had been forcibly removed from Hungarian cities and their property confiscated; that all Czech Jews in the Communist Party had been purged and imprisoned on charges of treason; that Jewish officers and enlisted men had been removed from the Red Army; that Jews in Poland were being forced into heavy industry, their co-operatives liquidated; that Jews in Rumania were deported to the concentration camp at Ruda Banya; that the names of almost all Jewish writers, artists and scholars had been removed from the new

edition of the Soviet Encyclopaedia.<sup>40</sup> Questions were raised in the House of Commons (for example by Hector McNeil, Labour MP for Greenock), the British Section of the World Jewish Congress lodged protests, numerous Anglo-Jewish organisations met to exchange views on the situation. But Party loyalists could take comfort from the testimony of Soviet Jews who claimed that there was no Jewish problem in the Soviet Union and from reports which claimed that Jewish citizens in eastern Europe lived 'no better and no worse than their non-Jewish counterparts'.<sup>41</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle* provided some disquieting information, however, as when it interviewed Israeliin Bluma, a Russian Jew passing through London on her way to join her children in South Africa. Mrs. Bluma had been denied permission to leave the Soviet Union in 1948, but had been granted that permission in 1953. She told reporters that after the state of Israel had come into existence Russian Jews had taken to the streets in celebration. This demonstration of 'disloyalty' had then led to a backlash resulting in the prohibition of Yiddish publications and mounting persecution of Jews. The Jews had been called 'wreckers'. But 'We have now in Russia a better government', she claimed.<sup>42</sup>

Of course by the early 1950s there was already a decades-old record of cruelty to place against the Russian dictatorship which Communists had learned to ignore or discount. But the tainted sources – Menshevik, Trotskyist, bourgeois – were increasingly supplemented by the testimonies of a new wave of Communist renegades, some bearing first-hand accounts of the *gulag*, from the 1940s.<sup>43</sup> *The God That Failed* (1950) was the best known collection of essays by the disenchanted, going through five impressions in its first year of publication. Some Party members claimed in retrospect that the daily demands of their industrial work left them with little time or inclination for these arguments about the Soviet Union. But they all belonged to an organisation which publicly revelled in its association with the country and Party publications were keenly interested in promoting it. They knew perfectly well that they were under sustained pressure to break all connections with it – from the bourgeois media in particular – and that the political mainstream denounced them for refusing to do so. Communism, according to Cold War propaganda, was especially given to murder and mendacity which it legitimised by means of a Marxist philosophy of history. This was said to be the basis of Soviet imperialism and the Kremlin's quest for world domination. Indeed the Cold warriors of the early 1950s demanded that any failure to adopt an openly anti-Communist stance played into the hands of this strategy. The very stridency of this demand, however, alerted many on the left to its ulterior motives.

What about the violence and lies of the capitalist West? Jean Paul Sartre, who had published truthful accounts of Soviet concentration camps in 1947, argued in 1952 that Frenchmen who opposed oppres-

sion should focus on their own state which was terrorising people in Indochina and Algeria. Whether they liked it or not, he argued, the French had to recognise that their country was part of a bloc dominated by the United States. All those French citizens who wanted to fight violence and lies with any degree of efficiency should do so against the French state and its allies, and not merely complain about the existence of these evils in other countries. Sartre gravitated towards the French Communist Party (PCF) during the next few years on the grounds that it was actually leading the struggles for social justice in France and peace in Indochina.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, of course, he lent legitimacy to the PCF and the Soviet Union. But if the Cold War distorted Sartre's logic, and led him to choose sides in the manner described, it could certainly confirm a Communist in his existing Party affiliation. A defender of the West's policy in Indochina might say that it was defending freedom; supporters of the Soviet Union justified its actions as a defence of socialism. The faith of some Party members crumbled under the weight of evidence before 1956 – Mervyn Jones was one – but most preferred to believe that any mistaken policies could in time be rectified, rather than conclude that the whole Soviet project was rotten.

### AFTER STALIN

After Stalin's death confused signals were sent out from Moscow as the various factions in the 'collective' leadership jostled for position. Even the leading British Communists were not much more than skilled 'Kremlinologists' in trying to interpret what was happening. Suddenly there was movement where there had been none in foreign policy. Churchill, in response to the new situation, proposed a summit conference in April 1953. It would be the first since 1949. An agreement was found to end the Korean War in July and a negotiated armistice became a real possibility in Indochina. The Russians stressed the doctrine of 'peaceful coexistence' of capitalism and communism, while announcing that they now possessed the hydrogen bomb. They negotiated an agreement with China in October 1954 providing for something like equality in their future relations. A treaty guaranteeing Austrian neutrality was signed in May 1955 and Soviet troops were finally withdrawn from the country. The Geneva summit conference – the culmination of the process begun by Churchill two years earlier – met in July. But it was Khruschev's visit to Belgrade in May 1955 that really turned Stalin's diplomacy upside down. Tito was not only cleared of all the charges brought against him since 1948, the joint declaration issued that June admitted that there were 'different forms of socialist development [which] remain solely the concern of each country individually'. It was now obvious – and Tito forcibly pointed this out – that eastern Europe contained many national roads to socialism and innocent Communists had been murdered as 'Titoites' because they

could see or had acted upon this possibility. The rehabilitation of men such as Gomulka in Poland now took place and the 'de-Stalinisation' of eastern Europe was hailed in the West. Before the end of the year British Communists were told that 'despicable agents of imperialism – namely Beria and Abakumov – had been responsible for 'disrupting' good relations between Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union.<sup>45</sup>

The Cold War was not over by a long way, however. West Germany was admitted to NATO in March 1955, prompting the signing of the Warsaw Pact in retaliation the following May. But the ground had been prepared for Communists to question what they had been told in the recent past. The Russians themselves had criticised the 'cult of personality' surrounding Stalin since 1954. It now seemed, in the wake of Tito's 'rehabilitation', that Stalin himself was a liar with blood on his hands. Stalin had orchestrated the campaign against Tito – now it was declared false, without apology or real explanation. Many prominent Communists had justified the judicial murders of the 'Titoites' – in Britain Klugmann, Kartun, and *Daily Worker* journalists who covered the trials such as Peter Fryer, must have immediately realised their guilty complicity, while others pointed to the culpability of the Dutts and Pollitts, on the grounds that they must have known the truth all along. A similar questioning and disturbance occurred throughout the Communist world. The façade of monolithic unity was beginning to crack though until 1956 there was no evidence of it at the surface. It was not until the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU met in Moscow between 17 and 24 February 1956 that Khruschev delivered the final blow for many Communists when he told a closed session – from which the delegates of the fraternal parties were excluded – that Stalin had been responsible for monstrous acts of mass terror including the deportation of 'whole peoples'; the cruellest methods of repression; violations of all legality; the murder of thousands of Communists since the Moscow Trials of the 1930s; and the filling of the concentration camps of the *gulag*.

A much milder denunciation of the 'cult of the individual' had been made in open sessions of the Twentieth Congress. The British contingent – Pollitt, George Matthews and Rajani Palme Dutt – would have known immediately that something was amiss by the absence of portraits of Stalin from the congress hall and the whisperings among delegates about past purges and current rehabilitations.<sup>46</sup> They came away from the congress determined to play down the significance of what they had seen and heard. Khruschev had given them plenty of material with which to do this (and there is no evidence that they had seen the full text of Khruschev's secret speech).<sup>47</sup> The congress had been regaled with the remarkable successes of the Soviet economy and evidence of the superiority of socialism over capitalism as it became a world system constantly expanding its human and technical resources. Capitalism, by contrast, was characterised by 'extreme instability' and

'profound contradictions' including the accelerating disintegration of imperialism. These were the emphases of Matthews' account of the twentieth congress.<sup>48</sup> 'We returned more amazed than ever at the incredible achievement of the Soviet Communists and the whole Soviet people'. It was the story which the leadership took with them to the Party's 24th congress (30 March-2 April), though by then Reuter had made known the existence of Khruschev's revelatory report.

'The outstanding feature of the new world situation is the decisive change in the balance of world forces, owing to the advance of socialism, colonial liberation and the co-operation of the peoples for peace', declared the Political Report delivered to the congress by Pollitt.<sup>49</sup> The Executive Committee argued that the 20th congress demonstrated that 'past mistakes and weaknesses were frankly and boldly recognised and corrected' while socialism has already, in peace and war, proved itself superior to capitalism'.<sup>50</sup> In closed session Pollitt gave a report on the twentieth congress and replied to the discussion by stressing advances made by the USSR in every field and repeating the bare bones of the argument about the 'cult of the personality' and Stalin's ideological 'deviation' – the mistaken idea that the class struggle intensifies in the approach to socialism. Stalin had nevertheless made a contribution to Soviet successes that would 'live for ever' in Pollitt's estimation. As for the role of the CPGB itself, Pollitt's only note of self-criticism concerned the Party's failure to organise a discussion in the wake of Khruschev's rapprochement with Tito.<sup>51</sup> Willie Gallacher admitted that he still had not come to terms with the publicly aired criticisms of Stalin that the Russians had made.<sup>52</sup> But some of the resolutions from the branches were unhappy with such incomprehension. John Saville wrote to Gollan describing the congress as a 'fiasco' and threatened to resign unless the Party addressed the issues raised by Khruschev. Evidence was already accumulating that many members of the Party were concerned that the self-criticism had not gone far enough. The argument was put that the mechanism for constituting the Party leadership stood in need of revision to admit of greater inner-party democracy. Others linked the existing mechanism (the Panels Commission) to the deplorable lack of self-criticism and to the need for a thorough Party discussion on the CPSU's twentieth congress.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile the Party leadership pleaded ignorance of Khruschev's report and Stalin's crimes.

But Khruschev's 'secret speech' was made known to the rest of the world in the months that followed. The *New York Times* published a summary in March, as did a Yugoslav Party journal. Polish Communists saw the full text in April, and the American State Department published it in June; so did the *New York Times* and the *Observer* in Britain. Information also became available to British Communists about the ways other Communist Parties had reacted to the revelations. The Dutch Party leaders apologised for their complic-

ity, the Czech Communists admitted that many of the purged 'Titoites' had been singled out because they were Jews. In the Danish Party (DKP) the Central Committee was openly divided by the end of April and the principle of collective responsibility had broken down among the leaders. The American Communists publicly criticised the Soviet Union in their Party press. The Party leaders in Quebec resigned in September and eighteen months of factionalism ensued. News of these and other Communist Parties in crisis leaked out to Britain. The British Party leaders were thus no longer in control of the situation as they reacted to the first murmurings of disquiet in the CPGB by emphasising business as usual. Even as they met in congress, the Italian Party leader Palmiro Togliatti called for a more thorough analysis than the one the Soviet leaders had already produced.<sup>54</sup>

The leakage of information, leading eventually to publication of the full speech, undermined the strategy of hoping that the fuss would die down. Khruschev depicted Stalin's 'immense and limitless power' and showed that Lenin's fears about his misuse of power had if anything been understated.<sup>55</sup> Stalin had 'practised brutal violence', 'demanding absolute submission to his opinions'. He had been ready to effect the 'moral and physical annihilation' of anyone who refused obeisance. Long after the political defeat of opponents such as the Trotskyists, or the followers of Zinoviev and Bukharin, 'mass repression through the Government apparatus' was used against them on Stalin's orders. Khruschev explained how confessions had been extracted by means of torture before the show trials of the 1930s commenced; how seventy per cent of the central committee elected at the 17th party congress had been murdered in these purges as well as over half of those attending the congress as delegates; he mocked the idea that stalwart Communists such as these could have been 'enemies of socialism' and disdainfully noted that 'confessions' were the only evidence produced against them. Yet this had satisfied Dutt, Pollitt and fellow travellers such as D. N. Pritt – and this would be noted by their critics within the CPGB. Khruschev also referred to the mass deportations of whole nations such as the Karachai, Chechen, Ingush, Balkars, and the Crimean Tartars. He exploded the myth that Stalin had played the main role in defeating the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. He exposed Stalin's pre-war liquidation of Soviet military cadre, his neglect of every warning of imminent attack in the summer of 1941, his inept interference in military operations once they had begun and his denigration of the victorious Soviet generals such as Zhukov when the war was over.

The 'secret speech' provided more questions than answers, however, as Togliatti observed. Khruschev's explanation of how Stalin was able to perpetrate these crimes rested on the insubstantial analysis of the 'cult of the personality', which was stronger in describing the dictatorial power and paranoid egomania of Stalin than how that power was

acquired and maintained. Khruschev described Beria as an 'enemy of the people', a typically Stalinist notion, and referred only briefly to the typically Stalinist secret trial and execution that had disposed of him. If Beria had been guilty why not Molotov, Mikoyan and other prominent survivors of Stalin's entourage such as Khruschev himself? There was much to discuss. Letters 'flooded' into the *Daily Worker*, according to its Features Editor Malcolm MacEwen, even on the basis of the little that was known to the membership in March, when Pollitt and his Assistant General Secretary George Matthews were pronouncing that all the problems had already been rectified.<sup>56</sup> Some correspondence was published in the paper (most was suppressed) but on 12 March the editor, Campbell, declared the discussion closed. This was wishful thinking. For many Communists, as Llew Gardner admitted, Khruschev came as 'confirmation of what many of us had feared was the truth but had concealed from each other and refused to recognise for ourselves'.<sup>57</sup> The atmosphere of 'miserable self-questioning' that had preceded February 1956 had cleared. A few days after Campbell's premature closure of the debate, as more details of the Khruschev speech were made public, the discussion had to be opened again. Maurice Dobb and Maurice Cornforth now took the opportunity to demand more consideration of Stalin's doctrine of 'the intensification of class struggle under socialism', while Christopher and Bridget Hill wondered how much the British Party leaders had known all along about the methods and results of Stalinism.

None of these questions was answered even though Campbell's editorial in the *Daily Worker* (2 April) boasted that the 24th congress had shown 'frankness and boldness in criticism and self-criticism'. The revision of the trial of Laszlo Rajk was reported while the congress was in session, giving the lie to this estimation. Pollitt did not follow Togliatti's lead until 21 April and 5 May, when articles by him appeared in *World News*. Though he refrained from all mention of the full text of the secret speech and omitted any reference to its shocking details, he did enough in spite of himself to underline the need for a full public debate, if only by 'withdrawing' the Party's previous attacks on Tito.<sup>58</sup> The New York *Daily Worker* had already admitted (14 April) that Jewish culture had been attacked in the Soviet Union after 1948 and demanded to know from the Russian authorities how this and the related murders of Jewish intellectuals could be explained. Soon afterwards an editorial in the *Jewish Clarion*, newsletter of the CPGB's Jewish Committee, made a terse reference to these murders in its April/May issue.<sup>59</sup>

Pollitt, evidently feeling the strain, was stricken by a haemorrhage behind the eyes on 25 April which temporarily left him with impaired vision. The May Executive meeting received his resignation as General Secretary on grounds of ill health (though it elected him Chairman of the Party with Political Committee membership). The prospect of a

membership revolt against the old leadership was already apparent as more details of the Khruschev revelations trickled out. The May issue of the *Jewish Clarion* returned to the matter of the attacks on Jewish culture during Stalin's final years and carried an article that had already been published in *Folkstymme*, a Yiddish-language publication of the Polish Communists, which provided detail of the anti-Jewish persecution and the recent rehabilitation of some of its victims. That month Dutt stepped clumsily into the breach with an article on the 'Great Debate' in *Labour Monthly* – but only to mock 'the inveterate Mithras-worshipper[s]' who could not accept that revolutions necessarily involved 'hardships, injustices and excesses'. His message was that the price of progress was worth paying and it was time to move on and drop the soul-searching about Stalin's errors.<sup>60</sup> The 'Great Debate' was not about Stalin, according to Dutt, but the onward march of socialism and national liberation, which people were in danger of missing amid all the fuss generated by emphasis on past mistakes. Stalin had violated collective leadership and the security organs had been abused but 'socialist democracy' in the USSR was fundamentally unaffected. The deviations in question had been caused by the period of abnormal strain between 1934 and 1953 characterised by the rise of fascism, war and cold war. But socialism had grown stronger during the same period in Dutt's view and collective leadership had been restored.

This attempt to minimise the problem badly backfired – Dutt received enough outraged correspondence to apologise for his choice of words in *World News* (2 June) and in the next issue of his *Labour Monthly*. Derek Kartun, Noreen Branson and Alick West were among the long-standing Party activists who complained to Dutt by letter and West reported the suicide of one of their disillusioned comrades.<sup>61</sup> Nobody had been a more fervent Mithras-worshipper than Dutt, however, and the substance of his argument was not changed by his apology. 'Criminal misdeeds' had 'stained an era of heroic achievement', he was prepared to concede, but the Twentieth Congress was the *culmination* of a 'gigantic process of review, correction and renewal extending to every field'. Dutt even ignored the public utterances of those Communists such as Walther Ulbricht who repeated Khruschev's exposé of Stalin's military incompetence; instead he paid tribute to Stalin's 'genius, unyielding courage, steadfastness and devotion to the revolution' both during the war and the reconstruction that followed it.<sup>62</sup> But while Dutt and the leadership,<sup>63</sup> like their counterparts in the PCF,<sup>64</sup> hoped that the controversy would blow over once the faction fighting within the CPSU was settled, fresh evidence and questions continued to be raised. Hyman Levy, the prominent mathematician, emphasised the anti-semitic tendencies that had been revealed to exist in Stalin's Russia. Other contributors to the *Jewish Clarion*, however, stressed the 'solid background' of Soviet achievement which outweighed such setbacks; some even denied the possibility of anti-

semitism in the Soviet Union, arguing that Jewish cultural activities had closed down in Moscow for lack of interest, not in response to official repression. But these loyalists now had to contend with critics who had reason to believe otherwise and wanted to know if the Jews arrested in March 1956 for distributing Zionist literature in Moscow were merely a fabrication of the *Manchester Guardian's* imagination, when the incident was reported in its pages.<sup>65</sup>

It is a measure of the leadership's disorientation and loss of the intellectual initiative that so much open questioning was possible in Party journals. But this was because the whole international Communist movement was in crisis and the old discipline had broken down. American Communist papers such as *Jewish Life*, for example, demanded to know how Jewish cultural life in the Soviet Union could be wiped out without the international Communist movement even acknowledging that it was happening.<sup>66</sup> This issue would not be swept under the carpet, too many Communists had emotional investment in fighting anti-semitism. Arnold Wesker recorded in his diary the 'Party members who are virtually in tears that they had ever been so lacking in courage as to approve ... the "ten doctors", "Tito", etc.'<sup>67</sup> Official Soviet sources tried to explain the repression against Jews as 'part of an anti-intellectual campaign which brought a similar fate to many nationalities'. The *Folkestymme* article was dismissed as 'slanderous and anti-Soviet'.<sup>68</sup> But by the time a British Communist delegation was sent to the Soviet Union in November to examine how the decisions of the Twentieth Congress had changed the situation of Soviet Jews, it is notable that its members (including the formidable Hyman Levy) would not be gulled on this issue; the section of its report dealing with the treatment of Soviet Jews remained highly critical of current Soviet policy and Levy himself remained critical of the British Party leadership.<sup>69</sup>

The Party's Jewish Committee, in conjunction with its International Department, convened a conference to deal with these matters on 23 September 1956.<sup>70</sup> Dutt, who sat on the Jewish Committee and headed the International Department, opened the proceedings with a defence of the official line. But though the usual measures had been taken to rig the conference – 26 of the 73 delegates were nominees of District and Area Committees, all but 12 of the remainder were invited, many at the request of Area Committees – Dutt only succeeded in exposing 'serious differences' on both the position of Soviet Jews in the years 1948-53 and on the Party Executive's response to the revelations concerning them. Delegates from Glasgow put forward three resolutions which the loyalists insisted would have to go before the Political Committee and could not be voted on by the conference. These concerned the contemporaneous trials of Zionists in Moscow (demanding clemency for the defendants); reconsideration of the Party's attitude to Zionism and the Jewish Question and support for

Jewish emigration from the USSR; and an expression of dissatisfaction with the CPSU for failing to expose the facts regarding Soviet Jewry. The conference also revealed disagreements about Soviet policy in the Middle East and the role of the Party's Jewish Committee. Some delegates saw the Committee as 'cultural experts' on Jewish issues instead of a centre for local agitational campaigns aimed at Jews, as the Party preferred.

After hearing Levy's report on the findings of the Russian delegation, the Jewish Committee supported the demand for clemency and took the view that the Soviet Union should provide more information. But it recommended 'no action' on the question of Jewish emigration and passed back to the Glasgow comrades responsibility for rethinking the Party's attitude to Zionism and the Jewish Question. Nevertheless loyalists such as Lazar Zaidman were in a minority in denying the existence of Soviet anti-Semitism. The majority took the view that 'the complete closure of all cultural expression and the liquidation of the Anti-fascist Committee must have been a high level Party decision'. The rationalisations provided by Dutt and various Soviet spokesmen were rejected. The Jewish Committee was also 'unable to accept the P[olitical] C[ommittee]'s estimate of the *Folkstymme* article, nor the attack on that paper by Ilychev' (the press chief at the Soviet Foreign Ministry). The majority of its members took the view that 'the PC made a major error of judgement in first refusing to deal with the *Folkstymme* article at all, and then only permitting *Jewish Clarion* to give it belated publicity. It has done immense harm to our standing amongst Jews who were compelled to go to the bourgeois press for information. This, combined with the deletion of that section of Howard Fast's letter dealing with Jews, and the refusal of the *D[aily] W[orker]* to print readers' letters has created the feeling amongst Jews that our Party was condoning evil practices (including anti-semitism) in a socialist country. Such a situation should never have arisen. Nor was the situation helped by the DW informing a number of readers that the *Folkstymme* article was not available to them - this does not correspond to the facts'. When the report of the delegation which visited Russia was published in the Party press in January 1957 it is significant that it formally acknowledged continuing restrictions on Jewish cultural rights in the Soviet Union. The Party could not 'manage' this aspect of Soviet reality as efficiently as it managed many others which it succeeded in minimising. The report also acknowledged that 'Crimes and distortions of this type cannot be the work of one man'.<sup>71</sup>

Many others thought the same thing - this was one of the main reasons why a debate was needed inside the CPGB from the spring of 1956. The Historians' Group, for example, rejected the official line at its meeting of 8 April, shortly after the 24th Congress, but issued no collective statement. By the summer individual members of the group such as John Saville and Edward Thompson had tried to provoke a

serious discussion in the correspondence columns of the Party's publications.<sup>72</sup> When this failed to materialise – even after the *Observer* published the full text of Khruschev's speech – they published *The Reasoner* as a discussion journal aimed at members of the CP. It only ran for three issues but managed to question the fossilisation of Marxism within the Party and the sources of its religiosity, sectarianism and centralism. After the first number in July, the Yorkshire District Committee instructed the editors to close it down but by then Thompson and Saville knew that the publication had supplied a felt need within the Party. It had sold out within weeks and most of the 300 letters sent to the journal supported the initiative. Saville and Thompson were then summoned before the Political Committee at King Street on 31 August. 'It was a complete failure of minds to meet', according to Saville.<sup>73</sup> Pollitt, Dutt, Campbell and Gollan emphasised the violation of Party rules; Saville and Thompson emphasised the need for an open discussion. The second issue of *The Reasoner* appeared in the nick of time before an Executive Committee meeting formally instructed cessation of publication.

## HUNGARY

Thompson and Saville still believed that the democratisation of the CP was an urgent and feasible necessity – indeed the Party Executive provided some hope in this regard when it decided in July, in the face of growing criticism, to appoint a Commission to examine and report upon problems of inner-Party democracy, including Congress procedure, and to make recommendations as a basis for discussion. The editors decided that the third number of *The Reasoner* would be the last, even if they were expelled or suspended from membership. But they were overtaken by events when the unrest in Eastern Europe unintentionally exacerbated by the Khruschev revelations – signalled by the riots in Poland in June – turned to revolution in Hungary at the end of October. *The Reasoner* condemned the first Soviet military intervention (24 October) and called upon the CPGB to publicly repudiate the aggression. Instead the Party ended up suppressing reports from its own correspondent in Budapest, Peter Fryer, when his despatches depicted the brutal repression of a popular uprising. The *Daily Worker* was accustomed to report the official view of events within the Communist bloc. The riots in Poznan in June had been attributed to 'secret agents', as well as genuine popular grievances, because the *Daily Worker*'s correspondent in Poland had reported what the government told him as well as what he saw with his own eyes. Fryer himself had been used to this sort of reporting, sending upbeat accounts of the reforms in Hungary since July. But he was also wrestling with his conscience. Seven years earlier he had reported on the Rajk 'Titoist' trial. Rajk's posthumous rehabilitation – 300,000 people attended his reburial ceremony – made him realise that he had

been misled and had misled others. Fryer witnessed the demonstration and learned about the torture and threats preceding Rajk's 'confession' during his stay in Hungary in July and confronted his editor Johnnie Campbell with the truth when he returned. Campbell confessed that he had known about such things since the Moscow Trials of the 1930s, when he had suppressed the truth in order to 'defend' the Soviet Union. The implication was that Fryer should do the same now, but he was already beginning to reject this policy when Campbell ordered him to go back to Hungary to report on the October demonstrations. On 29 October the *Daily Worker* boasted that 'no-one is better qualified for such an assignment'.<sup>74</sup> Campbell, knowing Fryer's doubts, made a curious decision in sending him to back to Hungary – almost as if he was tempting fate. He had certainly suppressed his own knowledge of Stalinist tyranny since the 1930s and acted as if he thought Fryer would do the same.

When the Poles put Gomulka in power on 22 October in defiance of the Russians, Hungarian demonstrators began to demand the return of their own 'national communist' Imre Nagy. Both cases were taken as evidence in the West of the continuing campaign against Stalinism encouraged by the Khruschev revelations. But there was also fear that a Soviet military intervention might stop the process of de-Stalinisation in its tracks if it threatened to produce a genuinely independent Poland and Hungary. Alison Macleod had been present at the editorial meetings of the *Daily Worker* staff as the Hungarian tragedy unfolded. She remembered the loyalists such as Campbell and his assistant editor Mick Bennett rejecting the way taken by the American *Daily Worker* – the way that criticised the USSR. But the paper's cartoonist Gabriel led the dissidents who had now grown tired of being expected to accept Russian statements without evidence (such as 'Beria, agent of imperialism'), and of operating double standards – great concern for the Rosenbergs, for example, none for Rajk or Kostov – while continuing to suppress dissident views. In relation to this last point, Malcolm MacEwen and Phil Bolsover, the foreign editor, argued that *The Reasoner* was answering a need of Party members and not just the intellectuals in the Party.<sup>75</sup> It was a need demonstrated negatively by the lack of independence shown in the *Daily Worker*'s coverage of the Hungarian rebellion. Though Fryer only arrived in Hungary on 26 October, an editorial of the previous day had already confidently asserted that 'Counter-revolution in Hungary staged an uprising in the hours of darkness'.<sup>76</sup> But Malcolm MacEwen remembers that 'there were members of staff begging and pleading and fighting for a more realistic line'.<sup>77</sup> It would appear that this was true in other parts of the organisation as well.

For example, a resolution condemning the Soviet military intervention (supported by its Executive) was defeated at the Young Communist League's conference only after a last minute intervention

from John Gollan. Yet Gollan appears, ironically enough, to have been the only member of the Political Committee who had argued that the Party should not support the Soviet military action.<sup>78</sup> He was thus despatched to argue for the collective leadership position. The YCL remained a source of critical thinking despite his intervention, with members invoking their nominal right to determine policy independently of the Party.<sup>79</sup> Members of the Party, meanwhile, wanted to know why the majority of Hungarians appeared to be fighting against a 'People's Government'. They also asked how they could have any credibility talking about Kenya, Cyprus, and Malaya when their own side was just as brutal and undemocratic as the representatives of colonialism. When Soviet troops began to pull out of Hungary on 29 October the *Daily Worker* declared that 'Russia Admits Mistakes' – mistakes the loyalists would not publicly recognise the day before, but which they could admit now because the Russians had spoken. On the 30th a siege of the Communist Party headquarters in Budapest ended with a massacre of Communist officials. Imre Nagy declared the abolition of the one-party system on the same day. Cardinal Mindszenty was freed from prison where he had languished since 1949 for his opposition to Communism. On 1 November Nagy announced Hungary's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and appealed to the United Nations to defend Hungarian neutrality. Soviet tanks rolled in the following day and by 4 November Budapest was subjected to a sustained military assault. Severe repressive measures were taken to reinstate the one-party dictatorship in the months that followed but it was not until June 1958 that an official communiqué announced the execution of the leaders of the revolution – Nagy, Palmeter, Jozsef Szilagyi and Miklos Gimes.

In the course of these events a British woman was released from a Hungarian prison after six years of incarceration. It was Edith Bone who had left Britain with an arrangement with Campbell to act as *Daily Worker* correspondent in Hungary – only to end up a victim of the secret police. Both Campbell and Pollitt had made polite 'enquiries' about her disappearance but with the exception of Allen Hutt, the Chief Sub-Editor, the rest of the *Daily Worker* staff were shocked to learn about her Hungarian existence, let alone the fact that she had been left to rot in solitary confinement. Nineteen members of staff now signed a statement which Malcolm MacEwen read to the Executive on 3 November arguing that the treatment of Edith Bone 'not only exposes the character of the regime but involves us in its crimes. It is now clear that what took place [in Hungary] was a national uprising against an infamous police dictatorship...'.<sup>80</sup>

But with only two exceptions the Executive Committee supported the second Soviet military intervention in Hungary. The dissenters, Max Morris and Arnold Kettle, immediately bowed to Party discipline so that the appearance of unanimity was maintained. Party members

now resigned in their hundreds. The trade union leaders John Horner (Fire Brigades Union) and Alex Moffat (Scottish NUM) departed on 13 November, with the former confessing that he had had doubts for the previous six months and no longer believed in the need for a Communist Party in Britain. Tellingly a meeting of Horner's own membership of the FBU in the North East expressed no confidence (79 votes to 6) in a leadership that could call for a general strike in protest at the British invasion of Egypt while being associated with a Party that supported the Russian invasion of Hungary.<sup>81</sup> There were reports of more dramatic instances of rebellion against the Party's hypocrisy. A loudspeaker van touring the London docks to condemn Government policy in Egypt was overturned by dockers demanding 'What about Hungary?'. Activists in Scotland reported hostility, some of it violent, on the housing estates they were leafleting, in the factories and shipyards and at open-air meetings.<sup>82</sup> Fighting erupted in the audience when Unity Theatre depicted a stage version of the Hungarian events late in 1956.<sup>83</sup> The Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolt was the best possible evidence that Stalinism had not died with Stalin. So was the suppression of the reports of the *Daily Worker*'s own correspondent in Budapest. Fryer took his evidence to the *Express* and the *New Statesman* providing the Party with an excuse to suspend his membership before finally expelling him.<sup>84</sup> The leadership followed the Russian version of the Hungarian events, arguing that military intervention had snuffed out a fascist counter-revolution in the making.<sup>85</sup> In repeating the Soviet line the leadership seemed to demonstrate that nothing had changed, but dissidents hung on to the fact that a special congress – which the Executive had finally acceded to in November – was scheduled to meet in April 1957. The official statement announcing the special congress struck a 'business as usual' note but admitted, albeit in a language similar to Newspeak, that the congress was 'necessary also in order to give the membership...the opportunity to pronounce decisively on the various tendencies towards diminishing the role of the Party or weakening its organisational principles'.<sup>86</sup> In fact it was arranged to satisfy the demand for a full discussion of the pressing issues arising from the Khruschev revelations, as well as the report of the commission on inner-party democracy and the new draft of the Party's programme, which had been in preparation since May. For the leadership's critics this was a final chance, perhaps, to overturn all that was wrong in the Party.

Certainly the Executive had received hundreds of critical resolutions since the spring. Initially, the most common had demanded publication of the full text of Khruschev's speech; a debate on the Soviet death penalty; more information; better co-ordination between Communist Parties; a special congress of the Party; discussion of the *Folkstymme* article; and a review of Party democracy. By December the focus of the critical resolutions had switched to condemnation of the

Soviet invasion of Hungary; the Party's support for the Soviet action; a demand for a conference of Communist Parties; a recurring insistence that the Party's own congress and procedures should be more democratic; proposals to change the method of electing the Executive; and protests at the suppression of Peter Fryer's articles on Hungary (12 branches – as against seven which endorsed or called for his expulsion). While two resolutions deplored the Party's handling of the *Reasoner*, two supported the Executive. Four more resolutions, evidently inspired by the *Reasoner*, called for a new discussion journal. Eight branches wanted to condemn the Executive for its handling of the Edith Bone case and called for a full investigation of it.

The point was put that even Lenin had tolerated a more open and factional party regime in times of severe strain such as the one the CPGB was going through and that there was a case for relaxing the Party's normal discipline. But Hobsbawm's argument was ignored.<sup>87</sup> The leadership had long enjoyed an atomised Party membership unable to meet collectively except under conditions designed to prevent alliances of the membership. The special Congress was more likely to signal the end of concerted opposition, rather than its culmination, because the leadership organised it in the usual way and continued to command the support, active or passive, of most Party members who were subjected to plenty of propaganda conflating the critics among them with 'the millionaire press', spineless intellectuals and the Party's inveterate enemies. It had also stacked the commission on inner-party democracy with loyalists – ten of the fifteen members were Party full-timers.<sup>88</sup> In the event two reports were placed before the Executive on 16 December 1956 and it was the Majority report which was inevitably accepted. The Executive rejected the Minority report, signed by Christopher Hill, Peter Cadogan and Malcolm MacEwen, on the grounds that 'its proposals would amount to the disintegration of the Communist Party as a unified political organisation'.<sup>89</sup> The Minority wanted a federalised Executive and factional rights so that the Party could become 'fully independent...fully democratic in its inner-party life...stand[ing] for the development of a democratic Socialism' and thus able 'to exert political influence in the British Labour movement...' <sup>90</sup> They rejected 'the conception of an "iron discipline", bordering on military discipline' which, though essential in Lenin's time, was 'inappropriate to our Party or to present British conditions'. The Minority could see that the existing 'bureaucratic centralism' would be endorsed by acceptance of the Majority report. They might have argued that the military discipline expected of members did not sit comfortably with the Party's formal commitment to a British road to socialism characterised by parliamentary gradualism and a pluralistic democracy. In reality the Party was caught in transition, but the contradictions of its position had not yet entered the consciousness of most of its members.

## THE 25TH SPECIAL CONGRESS

The 547 voting delegates at the special congress (19-22 April 1957) had an average of 14 years membership of the Party and were fairly representative of its social composition. They were told that 'Revisionism' was 'the main danger at present' confronting them. It was the common factor everywhere – in Poland, Hungary and inside the CPGB. Firm adherence to the principles of 'working-class internationalism' and approval of the policy of the Executive in relation to the Soviet invasion of Hungary was now required. At the gates the delegates were petitioned by various Trotskyist and far left groups peddling their own answers to the crisis.<sup>91</sup> Peter Fryer's undelivered speech was presented to them, displaying the author's naïve belief that the Hungarian rising had shown the continuing vitality of soviets as organs of popular democracy, as well as his version of what had really happened. It caught the mood of at least some of the dissidents in calling for the 'transformation of this Party into the revolutionary Marxist vanguard of the British working class'.<sup>92</sup> It was the intention of some of them to bring this about one way or another even if the Party was destroyed in the process. Fryer, for example, – who attended the congress as a reporter for *Tribune* – announced the decision to launch the weekly *Newsletter* as part of the process of keeping the pot boiling.<sup>93</sup> Beyond the conference hall, according to a 'political letter to members' which was sent after the congress had ended, 'the capitalist press has tried in every way to distort' its proceedings and the 'effort to disrupt the Party' had taken on new forms. 'An organised effort is being made', it asserted, to draw Party members into the orbit of Trotskyists and renegades. Inside the hall, the congress had heard 'contributions which tended to undermine the foundations of Marxism-Leninism, of working-class internationalism and democratic centralism, and suggested the liquidation of the Party...But in the special conditions of this discussion, opportunity was given for these viewpoints to be put forward...' <sup>94</sup>

So it had been: 93 delegates had spoken from the floor in the debate but the membership had also been subjected to a sustained propaganda offensive in the run-up to the congress in the Party press.<sup>95</sup> The leadership had consistently sought to depict the dissidents as middle-class intellectuals unrepresentative of its working-class membership base. Various speakers from the floor of the congress took up this theme – including Sam Taylor and Tom Hopkins (miners from Scotland and Wales, respectively), Bill Dunn (convenor at an engineering plant on Clydeside) and Reg Birch, a rising star of the Party's faction in the AEU). Alan Bush, the eminent composer, joined in by referring to 'the theorists of Belsize Park' who imagined that the Hungarian revolt could have led to democracy. While star-gazing in this fashion, Bush asserted, 'people were being strung up and burned to death by the Fascists'. Arnold Kettle expatiated at length on the problem of intel-

lectuals who 'feel the pressures of capitalist society in a different way' and resort to petty bourgeois individualism by placing 'subjective sincerity' above 'the doing of the necessary right thing' in 'the service of humanity'.<sup>96</sup>

The congress opened with Gollan asserting that 'when we are considering what went wrong, we should never forget' that the Soviet Union 'blazed the trail for proletarian revolution', 'tore the guts out of Hitler's army', had 'been the consistent supporter of every colonial people fighting for freedom' and had 'led the struggle for peace'.<sup>97</sup> It would probably have been useless to observe that the Party no longer stood for 'proletarian revolution', or that the Soviet military successes had had very little to do with Stalin's leadership, let alone to point out that Russian atomic bombs were trained on Britain, notwithstanding all the statements in favour of peace issuing from Moscow. Loyalty to the Soviet Union had deep emotional supports and the subjects raised by Gollan represented some of their roots – the glorious October Revolution, the fight against fascism which all Communists had waged but which the Soviet Union had paid for in blood and destruction, only to be double-crossed by its erstwhile Allies, the bitter enemies of socialism. Many delegates responded to Gollan's signal. Idris Cox took up the issue of imperialism, invoking the advances made since the Bandung Conference (1955) and the growing power of the national liberation movements. Solly Kaye stressed the decline of British imperialism and the dangers of a racist offensive against immigrants and Jews once the economic rot began to show. Frank Haxell invoked the Soviet Union as a model of 'the running of industry and of workers' control of industry'. Abe Moffat referred to its general economic achievements – a matter of considerable current interest well beyond the ranks of the Communist Party.<sup>98</sup> Others simply demanded Party 'business as usual'. A callow Arthur Scargill wanted more effort to build the YCL, while fellow miner Mick McGahey thundered against those who attacked democratic centralism and the leading role of the Party. On this subject George Bridges added that only the Party could bring the far-sighted vision of Marxist analysis to bear on working-class struggles. This, all had been conditioned to believe, was why the Party was indispensable, even though it was now admitted that unity with the Labour Party was also essential for advance to socialism in Britain.

Even the dissidents conceded some of these points. Don Hunter did not deny that the Soviet Union was socialist, but simply demanded the right to criticise it and think for himself. Brian Behan of the Executive agreed that the 'main job of the Communist Party is to lead' but also wanted a proper examination of the roots of Stalinism. Some went further. Barratt Brown wanted to know how the Party could expect to win the confidence of Labourites when it supported judicial murder, trials without proper defence counsel, and the crushing of political opponents – as long as all these things happened in the land of social-

ism. Hyman Levy demanded to know from the leadership – the leadership which warned of the danger of revisionism – where was the analysis of how the Party had come to lose 7,000 members in the course of the year (a figure which Gollan acknowledged in his opening Report). This was the very ‘liquidationism’ that they were frightened of, but it did not arise from revisionism but as a consequence of their own sheepishness towards the ‘cast-iron bureaucracy’ of the USSR – a ‘form of gangsterism’ in Levy’s view – that had developed out of the backward socio-economic conditions of Russia. Levy said he was ‘too much of a Marxist’ to be taken in by ‘the cult of personality’ as an explanation of Stalinism. But he asked ‘Isn’t it the truth that the leadership knew what was going on, didn’t trust you, didn’t trust the working class, thought you couldn’t take it? Is this what you call Marxism?’. In the course of his own contribution in favour of the Minority report on inner-party democracy Christopher Hill described Levy’s speech as the most important of the congress. The shock of 1956, he explained, had been largely due to the habit of following leaders who themselves hushed things up. One quarter of the membership had deserted the Party because these leaders had continued to do all that they could to stifle discussion and analysis. ‘Those of us who had a special knowledge of the Soviet Union have a grave responsibility for not speaking out about things we knew or suspected – and that goes for me as well as for Andrew Rothstein. But the leadership bears the gravest responsibility of all’.<sup>99</sup> Levy’s speech was ‘answered’ with a polemic against ‘backboneless’ intellectuals but he was undeterred and continued to speak to meetings of Communists and ex-Communists about his Russian discoveries.<sup>100</sup> In 1958 he published *Jews and the National Question* in which he explained the degeneration of the Russian revolution into a bureaucratic dictatorship in terms which were significantly more Marxist than those of the ‘cult of the individual’. But in March Dutt announced that Levy had made his final break with Marxism and Levy publicly accepted his expulsion from the Party that he had loved for a quarter of a century.

### **THE FALLOUT**

For all the drama it witnessed the 25th Congress behaved according to precedent in accepting the leadership’s ‘recommended list’ for elections to the Executive Committee. No dissidents featured in this list. The flow of resignations from the Party grew in volume after the 25th Congress, leading to a loss of around 9,000 members in total in the period up to January 1958, including most of its prominent intellectuals and half of the YCL membership. The Party itself estimated that it had lost around one-quarter of its white-collar members, about one-eighth of its industrial workers.<sup>101</sup> Around 2,000 members left in the wake of the Khruschev speech and another 5,000 quit over Hungary, with roughly 2,000 more resigning after the 25th Congress. Daily

*Worker* sales fell from a daily figure of 77,000 copies in January 1956 to 63,000 a year later – a loss of 20 per cent and not much less than the 28 per cent fall in membership.<sup>102</sup> The CPGB's reaction to the Khruschev revelations, the months of introspection, made some of its members realise that for people who prided themselves on their critical intelligence they had been mere sentimentalists in relation to the Soviet Union, woefully ignorant of Communist history and lamentably passive in relation to their own Party leadership.

But what did the events of 1956 change? Three-quarters of the membership remained in the Party, though some of them accepted much of what the dissidents said. Margot Heinemann was a case in point and was not asked to serve on any of the Party's leading bodies again until the late 1970s. Others claimed that the discussion in branches was muted, that people had simply stayed away or had got on with business as usual, little affected by the apparent turmoil and agonising.<sup>103</sup> We will return to this issue in subsequent chapters but we have already seen that doubts existed even in the leadership and that some members of the Executive accepted Party discipline only after expressing dissident views. The same was true elsewhere in the organisation, including those who signed the Majority Report of the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy.<sup>104</sup> Of those who left the Party, a small number – Peter Fryer, Peter Cadogan and Brian Behan are examples – joined the Trotskyists (and soon came to regret it).<sup>105</sup> Such people had evidently not become disillusioned with Leninism when they resigned from the Party. Saville and Thompson launched the *New Reasoner: A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Humanism* in the spring of 1957 while other former Communists, based at Oxford University, such as Raphael Samuel and Peter Sedgwick, were associated with the other important journal of the incipient New Left – *Universities and Left Review* – which was started later that year. After 1956 the Communist Party could no longer claim a monopoly of Marxist analysis and political intervention. Apart from the Trotskyists, there was now a New Left devoted to socialist humanism to contend with. The loss of so many able intellectuals and talented people at the *Daily Worker* – between one-third and half the editorial staff resigned – meant that the Party was doubly handicapped in having to do so. But other renegades of 1956 remained close to the Party and became part of that Broad Left which the organisation courted in the unions by the early 1960s – for example Bert Wynne, Secretary of the Derbyshire NUM, Bill Jones of the London bus workers, and Leo Keely of the FBU.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps the Anglo-French-Israeli conspiracy to overthrow Abdul Nasser in Egypt, which took place at the same time as the Hungarian crisis, is one of the reasons that so many dissident Communists remained active socialists – the Suez crisis supplied a sharp reminder that imperialism was one of the reasons they had joined the

Communist Party in the first place. Demonstrators demanding a ceasefire in Egypt were told about the second Russian invasion of Hungary as they approached Downing Street on their way to a Trafalgar Square rally to be addressed by Bevan and Gaitskell. The Communists on this demonstration were easy to dismiss as hypocrites. The ex-Communists who remained active socialists were not so easy to dismiss. Among the Party's trade union contingent Lawrence Daly, a rising star in the Scottish NUM and a member of the Scottish District Committee, is a prominent example of a renegade whom the Communists could not afford to ignore and could not hope to discredit. Daly founded the Fife Socialist League in February 1957 and went on to take council seats in what was a Communist and Labour stronghold (Ballingray). He also became a force in the union while supporting a variety of internationalist and radical causes. Eventually the Party supported his candidature for office in the NUM, proving that by the mid-1960s it was at last able to admit its need for such independent socialists. But other renegades did what the disillusioned Communists of the recent past had done – they became committed anti-Communists, rather than active socialists of a different stripe. In the ETU the Party lost Les Cannon and Frank Chapple who henceforward devoted much of their time to breaking the Party's grip on the leadership of the union, using techniques they had learned as Communists. In the FBU the Party lost able leaders such as John Horner, John Grahame, T. Haston and R. F. Bagley (though Bob Bagley rejoined) and its electoral machine in the union was smashed as all but one of the 16 Communists on the Executive followed the four national officers out of the Party. The Party's strong base among London busmen was also weakened by the crisis, but every area of trade union work was adversely affected, even those that showed some signs of recovery (such as the London bus workers) in the months and years that followed.<sup>107</sup>

It is understandable that those who left the Party did so in the belief that a watershed had occurred in their own political development. But it is less obvious that 1956 has this significance for the British Left as a whole. Stalinism was not finally exposed and definitively defeated. The Party recovered its membership losses by 1962. It remained a force in the trade unions and actually expanded its influence in some industrial localities.<sup>108</sup> The Soviet Union, with the help of *Sputnik*, continued to fascinate socialists on the left of the Labour Party and trade unions. The idea that Russia was a socialist country with a successful economy that was destined to overtake the capitalist West remained convincing for Communists and many non-Communists alike well into the 1960s. The Communists were also far from finished as an intellectual influence on the British Left and their strategic conceptions – including the British road to socialism – differed very little from those entertained by many Labour socialists. Indeed they almost came to fruition.

## NOTES

1. See F. King and G. Matthews (eds), *About Turn: The Communist Party and the Outbreak of the Second World War*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1990, pp80, 86.
2. The historian Christopher Hill was actually living in Moscow in 1935-6 and disbelieved later British press reports of 'show trials' because he was already familiar with misleading press stories which contradicted his experience of Russia. Interview in K. Hudson, 'The Double Blow: 1956 and the CPGB', unpublished PhD, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1992, p200.
3. See G. Watson, 'Were the Intellectuals Duped?', *Encounter*, December 1973. The article reviews the evidence of Bolshevik violence against political opponents after the seizure of power.
4. M. Jones, *Chances*, Verso, London 1987, pp114-5.
5. The one that caused the most publicity was Douglas Hyde's, *I Believed: The Autobiography of a Former British Communist*, Heinemann, London 1950, with its allegations of sexual impropriety within the Party (never corroborated elsewhere it must be said). It was followed by C. H. Darke, *The Communist Technique in Britain*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1952. Hyde had worked as news editor of the *Daily Worker*, Darke was both a trade union official and local government councillor.
6. D. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade: Volume 2 of My Autobiography, 1949-62*, Flamingo, London 1998, p52.
7. A. Macleod, *The Death of Uncle Joe*, Merlin, London 1997, p12.
8. Olive Budden to Harry Pollitt, 8 January 1951, written in response to Pollitt's appeal for suggestions to go in his report to the 1952 national congress.
9. See correspondence columns of *World News*, 3, 31, 4 August 1956, p496.
10. H. McShane, *No Mean Fighter*, Pluto, London 1978, pp244-5.
11. See, for example, *Daily Worker*, 22 December 1952 and its coverage of the trial of Rudolf Slansky.
12. Rose Cohen, who disappeared in the Russian purges of the 1930s, had been an intimate friend of Harry Pollitt's. The British Party leaders raised questions about her but did not persist with their enquiries. The Pollitts were also close to the Czech Communist Otto Sling who was shot as a traitor in 1952. Rosa Rust, daughter of Party leader Bill Rust, survived years in Stalin's labour camps and returned to Britain to tell the tale in 1944 – though her father refused to acknowledge the fact. Johnnie Campbell's oldest stepson became a Russian citizen in the 1930s and experienced and witnessed the persecution.
13. A. Westoby, *Communism Since World War Two*, Harvester, London 1981, p73.
14. An account of the procedure is given in F. Fejto, *A History of the People's Democracies*, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth 1974, pp14-25.
15. J. Klugmann, 'Lessons of the Prague Trial', *Communist Review*, March 1953.

16. J. Moss, 'Tito Threatens Peace and Unity', *Communist Review*, July 1951, pp208-9.
17. *Daily Worker*, 7 March 1953; *Labour Monthly*, April 1953 in Dutt's 'Notes of the Month'.
18. See R. Black, *Stalinism in Britain*, New Park, London 1970, pp427-8.
19. 'Khruschev's Report', *World News*, 3, 26, 30 July 1956, p420.
20. Jones, *Chances*, pp116-7.
21. Lessing, *Walking in the Dark*, pp79-80, 56.
22. *Ibid*, p52.
23. D. Lessing, letter to the editors, *The Reasoner*, 2, September 1956, pp11-13. We kept silent, Lessing argued, because: 'We believed that Communism had a vitality and moral vigour that would triumph over the brutality and intellectual dishonesty that had undermined it. We were right to think so. But we did keep silence, knowing exactly what we were doing.'
24. See, J. Callaghan, 'The Road to 1956', *Socialist History*, 8, Pluto Press, London 1995, pp13-22.
25. 'On 3 January 1953 it was announced that nine professors of medicine, employed as house doctors to the rulers in the Kremlin, had been suddenly arrested and thrown into jail. They were accused of having poisoned some of their illustrious patients; of planning further assassinations, of attempts on the lives of Soviet Marshalls and Generals in order to weaken the country's defences; of acting at one and the same time in the interests, and on behalf, of British and American Secret Services and the Jewish international organisation, the Joint'. I. Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, Merlin, London 1981, p82.
26. *Our Weekly Letter*, number 4, 23 January 1953, p1. Zaidman Papers, University of Sheffield, 118/9i/3. L2.
27. Quoted in *ibid*, pp5-6 and p1.
28. *Volkzeitung*, 28 May 1949, Augsburg. Quoted in 'What War Preparations Mean For Jews', Zaidman Papers, 118/9f/6b.
29. Sam Lipshitz, 'Their Hysteria - A Measure of Their Defeat', *Vochenblatt*, Canadian Jewish Weekly, Toronto, 11 December 1952.
30. Quoted in *ibid*.
31. CP Education Syllabus on the Jewish Question', nd, Zaidman Papers, 118/9f/4.
32. *Ibid*, p1.
33. A. Rothstein, 'Zionism', *Labour Monthly*, March 1953, pp124-129. Plekhanov is attributed with having made the last point.
34. *Ibid*, pp128-9.
35. 'Marxism and the Jewish Question', anonymous, nd, Zaidman Papers, 118/9f/14.
36. L. Schapiro, *The Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, second enlarged edition, Methuen, London 1970, p543.
37. 'Marxism and the Jewish Question', p3.
38. All the newspaper cuttings referred to in this paragraph come from Lazar Zaidman's papers.
39. Macleod, *Death of Uncle Joe*, p37.
40. *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review*, 9 May 1954.
41. *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 July 1954, p14; *Democratic German Report*, 16 January 1953. Both publications were Communist controlled.

42. *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 June 1954.
43. Anton Ciliga's *The Russian Enigma* was published in English in 1940 as was Walter Krivitsky's *I Was Stalin's Agent*; in 1941 Louis Fischer's *Men and Power* appeared; and towards the end of the war parts of Victor Serge's memoirs were published in *Politics between June 1944 and June 1945*. Then came Alexander Barmine's *One Who Survived* (1945); D. J. Dallin's and B. I. Nicolaevsky's *Forced Labour in the Soviet Union* (1948); Margaretta Buber-Neumann's *Under Two Dictators* (1949); and Freda Utley's *Lost Illusion* (1949).
44. A. Cohen-Solal, *Sartre*, Minerva, London 1991, pp327-61
45. See 'The Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia', *World News*, 2, 50, 10 December 1955, pp936-7.
46. See V. Vidali, *Diary of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union*, Journeyman, London 1984. Vidali was a delegate of the PCI.
47. According to Robert Service (in *A History of Twentieth Century Russia*, Penguin, London 1998), foreign Communists attending the 20th congress were given copies of the speech as they departed for home. Unfortunately no evidence has been adduced to support this claim. See Steve Parsons' comments in *Communist History Network Newsletter*, 9, Autumn 2000, p4.
48. G. Matthews, 'The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU', *World News*, 3, 11, 17 March 1956, pp163-7.
49. Resolutions and Proceedings of the 24th Congress of the CPGB, CP/CENT/CONG/09?02.
50. Draft Statement of the EC on the 20th congress', CP/CENT/CONG/09/03.
51. 'Notes for Report on 24th Congress', *ibid*.
52. See Dave Michaelson's notes on the closed session in the Michaelson Papers, Modern Records Centre, Warwick University, MSS.233/3/4/3.
53. See the resolutions from Bishopgate Rails, Earls Court and Radcliffe branch, South West Ham, Wallasey, and Bromwood, 'Resolutions for Party Organisations to 24th Congress', CP/CENT/CONG/09/05.
54. 'Stalin and Collective Leadership', *World News*, 3, 13, 31 March 1956, pp201-3.
55. N. Khruschev, 'Secret Speech to the Closed Session of the Twentieth Party Congress', February 25, 1956, <http://www.trussel.com/hf/stalin.htm>, accessed October 2000.
56. M. MacEwen, 'The Day the Party Had to Stop', in R. Miliband and J. Saville (eds.), *Socialist Register*, London, Merlin, 1976, pp25-6.
57. L. Gardner, cited in L. Black, 'British Communism and 1956: Party Culture and Political Identities', MA thesis, University of Warwick, September 1994, p37.
58. H. Pollitt, 'The 20th Congress of the CPSU and the role of Stalin', *World News*, 21 April 1956, pp246-8.
59. *Jewish Clarion*, new series, 7, April-May 1956.
60. 'The Great Debate', *Labour Monthly*, May 1956, p194.
61. See my *Rajani Palme Dutt*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1993, pp269-70.
62. Notes of the Month, *Labour Monthly*, June 1956, pp250-51.
63. See the Political Committee statement on 'Khruschev's Report' in *World*

- News*, 3, 26, 30 July 1956 and George Matthews's reply to Edward Thompson in the same issue, p420 and pp409-410.
64. See the interviews with Jean Pronteau and Maurice Kriegel-Valrimont in *Socialist Register 1976*, Merlin, London 1976, pp58-67.
  65. *Jewish Clarion*, 10 and 11, September and December 1956.
  66. *The Reasoner*, July 1956, pp24-6.
  67. Quoted in F. Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party*, John Murray, London 1995, p139.
  68. L. F. Ilychev, the press chief of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, is one of a number of Russian sources cited in a document in the Zaidman Papers (118/9e/2) headed 'Copy of Interview with L. F. Ilyichev, Tabitha Petran, National Guardian (USA) Staff Correspondent'.
  69. 'Report of the Delegation to the Soviet Union', October-November 1956, CP/CENT/EC/04/03. Levy – a speaker of Yiddish, German and French – was given the task of examining the Jewish experience in the Soviet Union since 1948. He reported (in the section 'Past and Present Position of Jews') that Yiddish publications had ceased, the Moscow Jewish State Theatre had closed down, the Jewish Anti-fascist Committee had been destroyed, its members tortured and killed, the 1952 edition of the *Soviet Encyclopaedia* had shorter entries on Jewish affairs and that private conversations with Jews revealed that 1948-52 was known as the Black Years. He observed that the 'indifference to human values' displayed during that period was due to a bigger problem than one man.
  70. The rest of the information in the next two paragraphs is drawn from an untitled report in the Zaidman Papers, 118/9f/1, which reads as a report of a meeting of the Party's Jewish Committee.
  71. *World News and Views*, 12 January 1957.
  72. Saville's letter to WNV is in the issue of 19 May 1956 and Thompson's in that of 30 June.
  73. J. Saville, 'The Twentieth Congress and the British Communist Party', in *Socialist Register 1976*, p11.
  74. A. Macleod, *Death of Uncle Joe*, pp100-101, 127.
  75. Ibid, and A. Macleod, 'Witness, the Death of Uncle Joe', *Socialist History*, 10, Pluto Press, London 1996, pp45-7.
  76. It continued by asserting that 'The Hungarian working class rallied around its Government and Party and smashed this attempt to put the clock back'. *Daily Worker*, 25 October 1956. On the 26th the paper speculated that the seemingly spontaneous development of a 'harmless' student demonstration into 'a major armed revolt' was evidence of sinister organisation.
  77. Quoted in *Socialist Register 1976*, p53.
  78. Ibid, pp53, 63.
  79. The October 1956 conference voted in favour of the abolition of conscription, though Party policy only called for its reduction to 12 months.
  80. Quoted in Macleod, *Death of Uncle Joe*, p177.
  81. *The Times*, 14 November 1956, p6.
  82. See C. Thornton and W. Thompson, 'Scottish Communists, 1956-7', *Science and Society*, 61, 1, Spring 1977, pp82-3.
  83. Cited from *Why we left the Communist Party*, Nottingham Marxist Group, 1957, p8 in L. Black, 'British Communism and 1956', p57.
  84. Fryer's interview in the *Express* is in the issue of 17 November 1956; on 24

November the *New Statesman* published his letter and two days later he was suspended by the London District Committee. The latter expelled him from the Party on 8 January 1957. Peter Cadogan fell into the same trap when his letter criticising the Soviet invasion of Hungary was published in the *News Chronicle* during the period when the Commission on Inner Party Democracy was underway. For breach of this taboo he was also suspended from membership for three months.

85. See *World News*, 5, 3, 18 January 1958, and Arthur Roberts' review of *The Truth About Hungary*, by Herbert Aptheker, Mainstream Publishers, New York.
86. *World News and Views*, 17 November 1956.
87. Correspondence in *World News*, 1 December 1956.
88. The known dissidents – MacEwen and Hill – complained at the outset that they had not been given enough time to thoroughly examine the problems at issue. They also took the view that the Commission should examine the workings of democratic centralism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, as well as obvious problems of the CPGB's recent past, such as its support for the Cominform line on Yugoslavia, the conduct of the Party press since the 20th Congress of the CPSU and the arrangements for national and district congresses of the Party. MacEwen subsequently argued that the Commission received no real evidence (such as Party records) at all and was unable to interrogate Party officials. See his 'The Day the Party Had to Stop', *Socialist Register 1976*, pp24-43.
89. CPGB, *The Report of the Commission on Inner Party Democracy*, as prepared for the 25th (Special) Congress, 19-22 April, 1957, piv.
90. Ibid, p59.
91. Including Gerry Healy's entrust group, The Club, and the Socialist Workers' Federation (Pat Jordan, Harry McShane and Eric Heffer spoke under its auspices) and the Workers' League.
92. Harry Challis argued that the CP should become 'an independent Marxist party politically free of Soviet policy' and sensitive to British problems. See the pre-Congress discussion in *World News*, discussion supplement, 26 January 1957, pp6-7. The very idea of a British road to socialism commended such an approach. Togliatti's leadership of the PCI pointed in a similar direction of 'national Communism'.
93. Fryer later joined forces with the Socialist Labour League (SLL), a Trotskyist sect whose members chanted, on the 1959 Aldermaston march, 'We've read our Marx and Engels, We've memorized the lot, Now Peter Fryer's working on, The book that Marx forgot'. The words appeared in handwriting in a copy of Fryer's *The Battle for Socialism* (1959), brought to my attention by Nick Spurrier.
94. 'Political Letter to Members', CP/CENT/CONG/10/5.
95. *World News* for example produced three discussion supplements (26 January, 23 February, and 23 March 1957) containing over thirty articles on the controversial issues. All but a few put the leadership line.
96. The various contributions can be found in CP/CENT/CONG/10/06.
97. J. Gollan, 'Political Report to Congress', pp46-7, CP/CENT/CONG/10/06.
98. As we shall see in chapter 3. The argument that Soviet economic advances

must lead to a thriving socialist democracy was heard in the Labour Party and among independent Marxists such as Isaac Deutscher. The CP was constrained from joining in this discussion by the fact that it asserted that the USSR was already a democracy. But see B. Davies, 'The New Stage in Soviet Democracy', *Marxist Quarterly*, 3, July 1956, pp184-204 for an attempt to utilise this argument to prove that a return to the Stalinist old ways was extremely unlikely.

99. Contributions at the 25th (Special) Congress, 19-22 April 1957, CP/CENT/CONG/10/05
100. Levy's treatment is thinly fictionalised in D. Lessing, *The Golden Notebooks*, London 1973, p466.
101. CP/CENT/ORG/19/01, 'Notes on 1957/8 Industrial Analysis compared with 1955/6'.
102. S. Parsons, '1956: what happened inside the CPGB', in *The Communist Party and 1956*, London, CPGB, 1993, p26.
103. See Thornton and Thompson, 'Scottish Communist' pp82-87, who interviewed a number of Party members and found a wide variation in their experience of the crisis.
104. Kate Hudson cites Christopher Hill as saying that Nora Jeffrey, the National Women's Organiser, and James Klugmann were both interested in democratising the Party, as was Kevin Halpin, the one industrial worker on the Commission, who only changed sides at the last minute. K. Hudson, *The Double Blow*, pp199-200. The same source reports that Maurice Cornforth expressed sympathy with much of the Minority Report's arguments.
105. See my *Far Left in British Politics*, Blackwell, Oxford 1987.
106. Detailed analyses can be found in S. Parsons, '1956 and the Communist Party of Great Britain', *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 47, autumn, 1983; K. Hudson, 'The Double Blow'; R. Stevens, 'Cold War Politics: Communism and Anti-Communism in the Trade Unions', in A. Campbell, N. Fishman, and J. McIlroy (eds.), Vol 1, pp159-91.
107. Steve Parsons names the following resignations in addition to those already mentioned: Fred Moore (London Divisional Organiser for the Masons), Richard Seabrook (East Anglia Organiser, USDAW), Bert Wynn (General Secretary of Derbyshire NUM), Jim Hammond (President of Lancashire NUM), Bill Wright (AEU District Secretary, Bradford), George Smith (General Secretary, Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers). See his '1956: what happened inside the CPGB', p32.
108. See F. Watters, *Being Frank*, Barnsley 1992. Watters helped to establish Communist influence within Yorkshire.

### 3. From the Cultural Front

In important ways the Communist Party was a conservative organisation. Argument was often by authority, a citation from the works of Lenin or Stalin could silence opponents within the organisation and end a discussion before it had properly begun.<sup>1</sup> The doctrines that counted tended to ossify for want of critical engagement. Leaders were rarely questioned and were often revered. The Party was accused by its enemies of living in the past. It was always imagining a return to the 1930s and there is a sense in which it was more comfortable in the familiar past of economic and political crises than the unfamiliar present of the 1950s and 1960s, when public rhetoric increasingly dwelt on the wonders of capitalist modernity.<sup>2</sup> The Communists often argued as if there was nothing new under the capitalist sun but they were increasingly obliged to address the social changes taking place all around them. They were also subject to a sustained and multifaceted ideological campaign which showed that they were variously dangerous and futile. Left-wing dissent was identified with support for the enemy and often dismissed as mere 'anti-Americanism'. Numerous persuasive, often contradictory, stories were spun that had the effect of underlining the Party's status as a living fossil. Socialism in Britain was identified with austerity, rationing, red tape, shortages and bureaucracy in 1950. By the end of the decade the emphases had changed. The pointlessness of socialist convictions informed the absurdist theatre of the late 1950s.<sup>3</sup> Social scientists, however, focused on the threat posed by such convictions to a tolerant, stable, democratic, society. The problem of ideology – socialist ideology in particular – and the dangers inherent in the active political participation of 'the masses' was stressed by critics who saw the seeds of totalitarianism in the 'politics of mass society'. Intellectuals, particularly left intellectuals, were depicted as morally unreliable and prone to extremism and utopianism; they were the types who tried to manipulate the atomised citizens of 'mass society'.

The Party had to come to terms with capitalist affluence, which it did in part by denying its existence. When it acknowledged that living standards had indeed risen, it stressed that it was only because of the success of the traditional trade union virtues of wage militancy. These virtues had to be defended, there was no question of that. While some

socialists reacted to mounting evidence of mass consumerism by turning to a renewed emphasis on ethical and cultural progress, moving away from materialism and back to William Morris or Edward Carpenter, and engaging with ideas of industrial democracy and the problem of modern alienation in a consumer society, the Communists continued to stress, as they always had done, the material abundance which socialism would make possible. They were increasingly forced to ride two horses – one celebrating the great material progress made possible by the socialist plan in the USSR, the other critical of the materialism of capitalist society. Commercial mass culture had been an object of suspicion and distaste to many socialists since the 1880s.<sup>4</sup> By the 1950s America was necessarily a major culprit and some of its exports, such as Hollywood and TV, could be objects of fear and loathing. Alison McLeod's television notes in the *Daily Worker* often conveyed this distaste. Similar sentiments can be seen in the evidence submitted to the Pilkington Committee on the future of commercial television. Commercial values were seen to crush creativity, homogenise and vulgarise the product, induce passivity and low critical standards, and propagate false values.<sup>5</sup> Advertisements themselves were thought to embody the shallowness, deception, waste, and exploitative characteristics of capitalism. By the late 1950s the new consumerism of the 'affluent society' was seen by its critics to encourage dependency, one-upmanship, acquisitiveness, indebtedness and improvidence. The affluent worker was popularly depicted as a natural Tory and evidence of the corrosion of the traditional working class, proof that 'I'm Alright Jack' attitudes were spreading. This was another reason to regard affluence with suspicion. Low attendances at political meetings, the demise of the street corner hustings, the perennial problem of drawing people into politics and keeping them active once they were in – all these familiar problems could be conflated with problems of affluence, the spread of television, the mass manipulation made possible by advertising and the growth of commercialised leisure pursuits – all of which were said to breed docility and conformity. Such sentiments did not go uncontested within the Communist Party, as we shall see, and they were certainly not confined to the Party; the critique of affluence under capitalism was accepted well beyond its ranks, into the Labour party and the New Left.<sup>6</sup> Even the 'Bollinger Bolsheviks' like Bevan were uncomfortable with other people's affluence and materialism.<sup>7</sup> Disapproval of what was thought of as 'material trivia' was one of the dominant sentiments of the left, rather than the property of one its tendencies.

In 1951 the Communist Party was still engaged in the struggle against cultural decadence that had been officially launched by Andrei Zhdanov at the inaugural meeting of the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in October 1947. In accordance with the Stalin-inspired *British Road to Socialism*, in which the Party promised to

'break with the policy of sell-out to America', American cultural hegemony in Britain became the chief object of this campaign. The defence of Britain's national cultural heritage was thus portrayed as part of the popular fight for independence from American imperialism. Exactly the same initiative had been taken in France and other West European states. It allowed Communists to champion the nation while at the same time denouncing imperialist culture – the imperialist culture of the USA in particular.

The Party's National Cultural Committee (NCC), first created in 1947, attempted to orchestrate this war of words through the special groups of Architects, Psychologists, Scientists, Writers, Artists, Musicians, Economists and Historians that met under its auspices. The sub-division of the NCC concerned with ideological questions encouraged these groups to find and promote Britain's radical-popular cultural heritage; to discover the talents of the native working class; and to defend the Soviet view on important cultural questions. The merits of socialist realism figured in this canon and national schools were organised to promote it. The cause of peace overlapped with the *kulturkampf*, the British Cultural Committee For Peace (1948) having spawned Artists for Peace as well as Teachers for Peace and other similar bodies. By the time of the third Artists for Peace exhibition in London in June 1953, the sponsors included Epstein, Matisse, Picasso, Augustus John, Stanley Spencer, Fernand Leger and Jean Lurcat.

The 'Battle of Ideas' was to be waged by placing 'Britain's Cultural Heritage in the Service of Peace and National Independence' to quote the title of the cultural conference which the Party organised for May 1952. Professor George Thomson, of the Party's Executive, opened proceedings by warning of the need to protect the nation's heritage of writers such as Shakespeare, Chaucer and Burns from a bourgeois culture that increasingly tended to the 'decadent, reactionary and cosmopolitan'.<sup>8</sup> Other speakers were at pains to sound less parochial and nationalistic than Thomson, but everyone knew where the principal threat came from. This had been the theme of an earlier conference attended by over 2,000 people in April 1951. The opening speech on this occasion was given by Sam Aaronovitch who kept his job as the NCC's full-time secretary until 1955 when the Party's cultural struggle slackened somewhat. But in 1951, as he extensively argued, the Party was determined that 'the synthetic, imperialist culture of the [United] States, coldly and cynically devised for the debasement of man' had to be stopped. It was, said Aaronovitch, the culture of the sixty families who ran the American monopolies. The men who craved for 'The subordination of the rest of the capitalist powers and their Empires [as] part of their plan for world domination, a plan which involves the launching of a third world war against the Soviet Union, China and the People's Democracies'.<sup>9</sup>

This lurid opening no doubt gained credibility – at least as far as

Aaronovitch's audience was concerned – from the fact that the Communists perceived the USA as the principal aggressor in Korea, as well as the architect of the Cold War division of Europe and the 'McCarthyite' campaigns against Communists the world over. Speakers following Aaronovitch's lead ritually distinguished the imperialist reactionary threat of the USA from 'American culture as such', but the two were just as quickly conflated. Though the American 'way of life' itself was said to reflect the outlook of the sixty families, many of the features of American mass culture with a mass working-class following in Britain were the objects of the Communists' (sometimes fabricated) fear and loathing. The essence of the 'American Way' was denounced as 'glorification of the almighty dollar and of so-called private enterprise. It is an incitement to racialism and hatred of national minorities. It daily worships violence, brutality and gangsterism'.<sup>10</sup> It was only a step, Aaronovitch observed, from 'nigger' to 'gook' (Korea) and then to 'limey' – made all the easier by 'the cult of violence' fostered by the American trusts in their search for world domination. Hollywood films, children's comics, advertising techniques which Goebbels openly copied in the 1930s, slush novels and magazines – these were among the means by which the USA enmeshed people's minds in lies, destroying their British rivals (film makers, newsreel companies, etc) in the process. This was nothing to do with 'cultural exchange', it represented 'a systematic, well-organised and financed attempt to impose coca-colonisation on the British people. We are dealing', Aaronovitch asserted, 'with "cultural imperialism"'.<sup>11</sup>

Alongside 'these arrogant gum-chewers', he continued, stood the British monopolists and the 'right-wing Labour leaders'. Concerned only to defend capitalism, these people openly betrayed Britain's national interest in return for dollar support for British imperialism. Their own culture was 'itself so decadent that, far from resisting the American "way of life" ... [they] ... welcomed it as a more vigorous and full-blooded expression of [their] own outlook', and even contributed to it. Britain produced an Orwell or a Huxley, Aaronovitch observed, and 'America puffs them up, mass produces them and re-exports them back to unlucky Europe'. Yet Aaronovitch also wanted his listeners to agree that 'what is threatened is our entire British cultural heritage' and having rattled off the great national figures of literature and science – 'Just the bare roll-call is enough to rouse one's pride' he averred – the Party's cultural commissar of the moment appealed to 'the genius of the British people' to come to its rescue. Other speakers followed this lead. The historians were enjoined to reinstate the 'militants' and 'ordinary people' of the national past. American literature, films, children's books and newspapers were discussed, or rather exposed, in their turn, as speaker succeeded speaker. Wal Hannington demanded that the unions resisted the 'unadulterated class collaboration' of their American counterparts and the techniques of speed-up that were

bound to be imported from the USA. An unconvincing J. Fyfe castigated American science for its 'shortage of ideas of any kind' and for its anti-scientific and anti-humanist bent as revealed by its liking for gene theory, eugenics and neo-Malthusianism.<sup>12</sup>

'The American Threat to British Culture' provoked a most synthetic defence of national culture from the assembled delegates, some of whom did their best to sound like the patriotic historian Arthur Bryant and the Soviet functionary Andrei Zhdanov rolled into one. But it should also be said that most of the Communists present, if not all of them, believed in 'the opulent and many-hued reality' of Soviet intellectual life which was counterposed to the dying culture of imperialism; they agreed with the young E. P. Thompson when he argued that the 'real moral issues before man' had never been clearer – the choice between socialist construction on the one hand and imperialist war and poverty on the other; and they shared his prejudice that things American were often justifiable objects of ridicule, trusting that 'the biting edge of British humour' would remain sharp and turned against them. The audience undoubtedly shared Thompson's faith in the purity of the socialist camp. The admittedly ceaseless talk of 'moral values', 'freedom and democracy', and 'the western way of life' emanating from contemporary news media, and the alarms about the alleged lack of 'human rights' in the USSR, China and Eastern Europe had filled the propaganda sheets. But what was this, Thompson asked, if not 'the Big Lie technique of Goebbels over again'. It was a lie 'so monstrous that we cannot be troubled with it, we turn our backs on it, and divert the argument on to more practical questions'.<sup>13</sup> Instead of refuting these lies about the USSR, he seemed to be saying, Communists focused their thoughts on the daily struggle – 'the trade unionists imprisoned and shot in Spain or Greece', as reported in the *Daily Worker*, if nowhere else, 'the hypocrisy of napalm-democracy' and all the other issues which confronted them. They saw, meanwhile, the 'American Way of Life' served up through commercial journalism, which was becoming increasingly 'degenerate and corrupt' in the process.<sup>14</sup> Given these inevitable preoccupations, we can see with hindsight perhaps why the Big Lie was secure for a while yet.

### THE CULTURAL COLD WAR

The Communists' anti-American campaign undoubtedly made a certain amount of tactical sense. 'To hear officials in the State Department or the US Information Agency tell it, Western Europe was a hotbed of "anti-Americanism" from the 1940s through the 1980s ... they believed there were large numbers of people who seemed to despise everything associated with America.'<sup>15</sup> Various reports identified the strength of this phenomenon in France, Italy, West Germany and Britain.<sup>16</sup> Numerous points of real conflict between the USA and various European states existed which could be exploited. This was the

Russian calculation. It was also true, however, that America was admired and respected in Western Europe at least as much as it was as an object of distrust – sometimes in the minds of the same people, but also by different sections of society in some of the more polarised societies such as Italy, France and Greece. But those American officials and British politicians (many of them Labour) who tarred all criticism of the USA as mere ‘anti-American’ prejudice also erred by conveniently dismissing the genuine concerns of people who feared American atomic power, resented US interference in their own country’s affairs and envied its power and wealth. In short there were real problems for the Communists to exploit – from feelings of national subordination to fears of cultural imperialism, of the invasion of American corporations and the imposition of the ruthless techniques associated with American business. These were among the reasons why the British political elite could not simply ‘co-opt “America” ... in an anti-socialist crusade, since that almost certainly would have alienated as many as it attracted’.<sup>17</sup> Most of the evidence suggests, however, that disdain for American mass culture as something irremediably brash and vulgar was stronger within European elites than it was among the people courted by the Communists. Certainly American mass culture had many working-class enthusiasts while middle-class liberals were more likely to publicly agonise about its soullessness.

The advent of the affluent society was not all plain sailing for these people. The world of consumer affluence could also be a world of alienation and vulgarity, of regimented organisation men and manipulated masses. This was the view of American liberals such as David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (1950); Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (1957) and *The Status Seekers* (1959); and William H. White, *The Organisation Man* (1956); as well as local visionaries such as Aldous Huxley who contributed *Brave New World Revisited* to the genre in 1959. Mass culture was also an object of snobbish distaste for defenders of the ‘canon’ of literature, some of whom such as the Leavisites in Britain had defined themselves in opposition to its exploitative side since the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> Richard Hoggart’s celebrated analysis of ‘working-class life with special reference to publications and entertainments’, *Uses of Literacy* (1957), worked within this tradition and was full of complaint about the ‘regular, increasing, and almost entirely unvaried diet of sensation without commitment’ that he found in modern mass culture in the 1950s. His Pooterish tendencies were most fully developed in his discussion of ‘the juke-box boys’, the young frequenters of milk bars who seemed, so he thought, to be victims of ‘a spiritual dry-rot amid the odour of boiled milk’. Hoggart perceived in these boys with ‘an American slouch’, the prototypes of the ‘directionless and tamed helots of a machine-minding class’. He argued that ‘The hedonistic but passive barbarian who rides in a fifty-horse-power bus for threepence, to see a five-million-dollar film for

one-and-eightpence, is not simply a social oddity; he is a portent'.<sup>19</sup> For present purposes it is enough to know that such prejudices, even when delivered in the most florid prose, could pass for cogent analysis. They expressed and sustained a mood of disquiet about 1950s modernity and gave it a vaguely leftish air, rather like the Angry Young Men of the theatre, whose values and politics were often deeply reactionary. The Communists, however, had to channel such disquiet into a specifically anti-American, anti-capitalist direction while all the while equating modernity with the socialism of the Soviet Union. The task was beyond them.

For the first time since 1919 the Communists were confronted by a systematic international campaign of opposition, this time globally orchestrated by the most powerful state in the world. Much of its cultural effort was designed to win European intellectuals to the American Way and its operational structures were mirror images of those used by the Communists themselves. Throughout the period 1950-67 the CIA ran a Congress for Cultural Freedom, set up in Berlin in 1950, which promoted numerous publications (including *Encounter* from January 1951), concerts, art exhibitions and conferences with this end in mind. While covert operations toppled governments that got in the way of this project and funded all manner of illiberal regimes as long as they were anti-communist, the cultural campaign spent tens of millions of dollars enlisting European intellectuals for the American cause. This neutralised many of them as critics of the power structures within their own capitalist societies and turned some into apologists for 'the West' in general and the USA in particular. The non-Communist Left was of particular utility because it contained disillusioned former Communists and Trotskyists – erstwhile insiders who could speak with authority on the Communist threat – and 'democratic socialists' who seemed to be more concerned with fighting Communism than advancing democratic socialism.<sup>20</sup> Sidney Hook, Philip Rahv, James Burnham, James T. Farrell, George Orwell, Ignazio Silone and Koestler were in the first category; most of the Labour Party leadership was placed in the second category not only by the Communists, but by a sizeable proportion of the Labour Left.

The Party also had to contend with Moral Rearmament and various Catholic organisations. Campaigns were waged against it inside the unions as we shall see below though cases of victimised Communists were much fewer in number in Britain than they were in the USA.<sup>21</sup> The Party's own defectors – prominent examples were few and far between before 1956 – were given huge exposure in the press and Douglas Hyde's *I Believed* (1950), telling of his disillusion and conversion to Catholicism, was a bestseller. American money made sure that copious amounts of bad news concerning the Soviet Union was given wide coverage. The good propaganda effect of the anti-Nazi war could not survive the flood of news concerning Communist repression in

Eastern Europe. Western propaganda meanwhile took pains to conceal any bad news about capitalism. Thus when *Encounter* was launched in 1953 with CIA finance, to counter the influence of the socialist magazine *New Statesman and Nation* as well as everything to the Left of it, it was notably reluctant to discuss McCarthyism, racism and inequality in the USA, British imperialism, US client regimes, and apartheid in South Africa. Nor would it regard any critique of American society as evincing anything other than a crude anti-Americanism.

Those who sought to expose and address the injustices overlooked by *Encounter* performed a valuable service and the Communists were among them. But the Party's cultural concerns in the early 1950s had other objectives as well. Plato Films, for example, was established in the spring of 1951 to distribute and show films, newsreels and documentaries from the socialist countries. Its controlling personnel were Party members such as Stanley Forman, Eva Reckitt, Bill Ellerby, Bill Wainwright, Alan Bush and Martin Lawrence. But it was also linked to Ivor Montagu's Progressive Film Institute (PFI) which was set up in the 1930s to produce films on and by members of the British labour movement. Plato took over many of PFI's films in the late 1940s and acquired films made by similar left-wing film institutes such as Kino and the Workers' Film and Photo League. In the 1950s Party election campaigns made use of film; and its own people (like cameramen Lewis McLeod and Manny Yospa) provided much of the expertise. A Communist Party cinema van toured during the 1955 local and general elections showing a silent called *Home Policy*. Plato's successor Educational and Television Films Ltd made *Our Life in Our Hands* as a party political broadcast for the 1964 general election and similar short films were made for the 1966 campaign and for Willie Gallacher's funeral in 1965.<sup>22</sup> The Communists had seen the propaganda value of film since Lenin's day and Hollywood was among their leading targets for attack in the 1950s. Given the nature of the competition, however, film could not be a successful medium of cultural intervention for the Communists, though the lengths they would go to in this area could be surprising – as when the Communist-led ETU spent over £10 million pounds on one such venture. The main medium of the cultural struggle had to be the written and spoken word and in the early 1950s the focus was the one supplied by Zhdanov. A number of initiatives on a smaller scale than the conference of 1951 were taken during 1952-3 within the regions in promotion of Stalin's Cominform agenda. In March 1953 Arnold Kettle stressed in his opening speech to a Leeds conference on 'Culture and the People' that the Party had to develop cultural activities of the broadest kind to enrich its own political activity. Literature, film and 'our Yorkshire heritage' were the main lines of discussion on this particular occasion.<sup>23</sup> Where possible the effort had to be made to reappropriate cultural icons in the battle against capitalism – Robert Burns, for example, could be promoted as 'an active leader and pioneer

in the battle against early Capitalism' and not the 'sentimental ploughman-poet' beloved by the bourgeoisie.<sup>24</sup>

In Scotland, Communists were involved in setting up the Edinburgh People's Festival, forerunner of the Fringe, with this type of thing in mind, as well as weaning the workers off a diet of 'Hollywood and chewing gum'. An Edinburgh Labour Festival Committee representing the Musicians Union and the Workers' Music Association was formed to get the working class recognised as both an audience and as a source of contributions for the International Festival. Within a few weeks various trade union, Labour, Co-operative, and trades councils had affiliated to the committee in May 1951 and the first Edinburgh people's festival took place between 26 August and 1 September that year – the middle week of the official Festival – with a programme in some ways reminiscent of the 'rational leisure'<sup>25</sup> preferred by the socialists of fifty years earlier. These pursuits now included folk music, a presentation by Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop (performing Ewan MacColl's *Uranium 235*), a Hungarian film and contributions from the poets Hugh MacDiarmid and Hamish Henderson, the film actor Alex McCrindle and director Ralph Bond. As in Keir Hardie's day the effort being made was to challenge commercial culture and commercial leisure pursuits – media of a poverty of desire in the Communist view and purveyors of values inimical to socialism – and to promote a range of participatory and emancipatory alternatives in their place. Scots and Gaelic folk-song at the Friday evening ceilidh, in the words of one of those present, 'began to reveal an, as yet, little explored treasury of song and singing' with the power to move the whole audience 'with a quality of pleasure and pride that made more intolerable than could many speeches the violence and tawdriness of the imperialist-American films and dance music that clutter up ... cinema and radio programmes'. The local Communists wanted to challenge the elitism, exclusivity and "snootiness" of the official 'International Festival' and to encourage working-class participation in all areas of culture. The week consisted of sixteen 'complete events' but it began with a one-day conference, attended by 200 people, which considered such diverse issues as the persecution of Paul Robeson, the crisis in the British film industry, 'the menace of the American comic' and the preservation and development of Scottish cultural traditions as exemplified in the work of the 'People's Burns Club'. The Communists were only a minority but the quality of their contributions to the debate, or so it was said, 'won the prolonged and enthusiastic applause of the whole hall'.<sup>26</sup>

By the time the third National Cultural Conference took place in London during October 1953 the anti-American momentum at the origin of the Party's recent cultural wars was beginning to flag, though there was still time for weekend schools such as the West Middlesex District Committee's at which solemn talks could be given on the

danger to children from American propaganda – especially comics.<sup>27</sup> Only 650 people attended the first day of the third cultural conference, rising to 1,000 on the Sunday but still less than half of those who attended the first such outing in 1951. Aaronovitch, reporting on 'Culture as a Weapon in the Fight for Socialism', reflected on the achievements of the previous year, including the publication of a new cultural magazine, *Daylight*, which endeavoured to publish working-class writers.<sup>28</sup> Two more national cultural conferences would be staged, the last in January 1955.

But the following year was not a good one for Communist culture as we have seen. Among the many victims of that year was T. D. Lysenko whose resignation as President of the Soviet Academy of Agricultural Sciences was accepted shortly after the 'rehabilitation' of the disgraced geneticist N. I. Vavilov. In April the eminent biochemist and geneticist J. B. S. Haldane officially and privately left the British Communist Party after a seven-year long 'phased withdrawal' which originated with his inability to support the Stalin-approved theories of Lysenko in 1949.<sup>29</sup> Significantly the Party's scientists' group, also known as the Engels Society – a group containing mathematicians such as Hyman Levy and Lancelot Hogben, scientists of eminence such as J. D. Bernal, Joseph Needham and Haldane himself – was the first post-war cultural group to fragment in the face of Stalinism when it was required to support Lysenko's theories. Several of its members resigned in 1949 and Haldane, chair of the *Daily Worker* editorial board 1940–49, wrote his last article on science for the paper in August 1950 and withdrew from political activity. By May 1952 Aaronovitch admitted to a meeting of Group and District Committee representatives that the Party was having little success in organising members and sympathisers in the sciences to carry out Party tasks. The Engels Society itself had ceased to function by that summer.<sup>30</sup> But it was not until an article appeared in the Polish newspaper *Zycie Warszawy* in April 1956 that Haldane's final breach with the Party was made known, as *The Times* gleefully observed upon picking up the news.<sup>31</sup>

Ultimately all of the Party's special cultural groups were damaged by the events of 1956, not only because they lost members but because they came to be seen as dangerous to Party stability. By bringing Party members together from different branches they could function as crucibles of factionalism. In fact the events of 1956 reinvigorated some of them. The Writers' Group was an example. First established in 1935 at the opening of the Popular Front orientation, it achieved some influence in the war years through its contributions to magazines such as *Our Time*, the most successful literary magazine the Party was ever associated with, though in fact it neither owned nor controlled it. Writers such as Edward Thompson, Roy Fuller, Hamish Henderson, Ted Willis, Alexander Bernstein and Paul Hogarth gave it a Communist identity through their contributions and some of them –

Willis and Bernstein are examples – came into doctrinal collision with Emile Burns for not toeing the Party line.<sup>32</sup> Burns had further battles with the journal once Zhdanovism was the established orthodoxy from 1948 and the following year *Our Time* – its readership much reduced – disappeared altogether. Paul Hogarth has recently described the battles with Burns, the Party's 'cultural commissar' at this time, and the delays in publication enforced by King Street which the journal had to accept because it depended on 'a national network of Party-controlled bookshops and sales outlets' to reach its audience.<sup>33</sup> James Boswell resigned shortly after the journal folded and advised his fellow-artist Hogarth to do likewise.

In the early 1950s, however, the Writers' Group (or Literature Group as it was now called) could still boast such members as Doris Lessing, who decades later recalled 'the usual extraordinary mix of people to be found in Communist Party cultural circles'; among them were John Sommerfield (veteran of the Spanish civil war, author of *Volunteer in Spain* and the anthology of short stories, *Survivors*), Montagu Slater (author of the libretto for Britten's *Peter Grimes*), Jack Beeching (poet), the Australian Jack Lindsay (biographer and novelist), Randall Swingler, and Ray Waterman. Lessing only remembers about 'ten or so' meetings and says that 'Discussions about literature did not refer at all to the party line and were critical of "socialist realism"'.<sup>34</sup> The Party's adherence to socialist realism had nevertheless done much damage and was at least partly responsible for the destruction of *Arena*, the quarterly magazine, which Swingler's own small publishing house, Fore Publications, launched in 1949. Andy Croft refers to the 'dazzling list of European writers' who wrote for the journal, including Pablo Neruda and Albert Camus, as well as locals such as Dylan Thomas and Angus Wilson. The National Cultural Committee was not satisfied, however, and instructed Jack Lindsay, the editor, to transform *Arena* into a 'fighting journal' of socialist realism. This helped to finish it off and by 1952 it was gone.<sup>35</sup> Other short-lived ventures followed including *Circus* and *Daylight*, the latter adhering to the Party's severe 'workerist' standards only too well (with illustrations by Communist artists like Paul Hogarth, Reg Turner and Cliffe Rowe), while its editors had to concede privately that there was a problem finding proletarian authors who could write well enough to contribute. Worthy of mention is the National Cultural Committee's campaign for 'factory libraries' to encourage the dissemination of Marxist literature and socialist classics such as the *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, as well as Bolshevik authors such as Gorki and approved popularisations of science. The confused rationale for this initiative need not detain us; suffice to say that because the monopolists owned and controlled the production of culture, the fight-back had to begin in the factories because the working class was the 'main force for defending and advancing the national interests of the people'.<sup>36</sup> By 1954 the Writers'

Group was effectively moribund and in 1956 most of the distinguished people who had once been associated with it – Lessing, Swingler, Edgell Rickwood, Sommerfield, Thompson, Len Doherty, and Jack Beeching – resigned, several of them to contribute to the *New Reasoner*.<sup>37</sup>

The Artists Group, which can be traced back to the Hogarth Group formed in 1933, encountered similar problems. Soviet denunciations of modern abstract art, as well as surrealism, expressionism, and futurism on the grounds of their bourgeois and decadent character, left an opening for the CIA which cryptically sponsored the *avant-garde* – no matter how abstract and obnoxious to suburban America – to demonstrate the breadth of Western artistic tolerance. Even Picasso, who had joined the PCF in 1944, was not spared the criticism of the socialist realists. The insistence that art should serve communism and the working class divided artists and can only have discouraged new talent from joining the Party, notwithstanding the subtlety of defenders of realism such as John Berger.<sup>38</sup> Berger championed the work of 'famously unacceptable' realists such as the sculptor and former Party activist George Fullard. One of the devices used in this promotion in 1956-7 was the Geneva Club which Berger set up in central London as an informal discussion group bringing together writers and artists associated with the Communists.<sup>39</sup> Established Party members such as Paul Hogarth and Cliff Rowe soldiered on through this period though they were also subjected to official criticism and cared little for the Party line.<sup>40</sup> Indeed Hogarth claimed later that 'we hated the party line, we hated the political leadership of the party'.<sup>41</sup> The Artists Group actually sent a memo to the Executive Committee at the end of 1954 admitting that its members were unsure of the meaning to be attached to 'socialist realism'.<sup>42</sup> But in 1956 Patrick Carpenter accepted that the group shared responsibility both for over-praising Soviet art and for condemning the most important artists in the West as 'formalists'.<sup>43</sup> Others contested this claim in the group's journal *Realism* maintaining that they had 'openly attacked the ideas of Zhdanov'. But anyone who had attended meetings of the Artists Group in the previous decade, according to Carpenter, was aware that 'appallingly narrow' definitions of socialist realism had 'often' been put forward.<sup>44</sup>

*Realism* folded at the end of the year and Hogarth – one of the few Communist artists in Britain able to make a living from his work (as an illustrator and cartoonist) – was one of those who resigned from the Party. It seems that his attendance at various international conferences and peace congresses had only added to his knowledge of the persecution in Russia through contacts with other Communist intellectuals who had exchanged their suspicions of what was going on together with odd fragments of telling information. During the Hungarian crisis, for example, Hogarth was attending a congress of veterans of the International Brigades in Warsaw and witnessed Polish and Hungarian

delegates challenging the Russians present to produce missing Brigaders presumed executed on Stalin's orders. Upon returning to Britain he contacted Robert Harling of *The Times* and gave him an eyewitness account. It later emerged that Harling was working for MI6 and had maintained contact with Hogarth in the hope of eventually obtaining just such a story.<sup>45</sup>

The Party leadership might be thought to have had little interest in the doings of the Artists Group beyond the Soviet requirement of the hour – that art should be an explicitly political, working-class enterprise. The direct political impact of the Hiroshima Panels of Iri and Toshi Maruki, which were brought to Britain in 1954, was never emulated by artists belonging to the CPGB, though John Berger was an eloquent advocate of Soviet art in the 1950s and a persuasive Marxist critic throughout the period.<sup>46</sup> Reg Turner's weekend schools on the production of posters and 'People's Prints' – lithographs, linoprints and coloured prints – which could be sold in left-wing bookshops, gave evidence of art's practical value, however, but even these efforts attracted criticism from within the Party when the work was found guilty of portraying the misery of the workers' lives rather than their determination to fight for a new society.<sup>47</sup> The Artists Group also did its best to permeate the Party and the left milieu the Party sought to influence. It organised public meetings (with the likes of Berger, Herbert Read, Mischa Black, and Peter de Francia), encouraged the formation of provincial groups, provided exhibitions for Unity and Theatre Workshop, made sure its members were active in the relevant professional organisations, designed union banners, produced illustrations, murals, mobile panels to adorn meetings and covers for trade union journals (such as the ETU's *Electron*) and Party publications. It also raised money through sales of its members' work.

Music was also embroiled in the culture wars and like many of the cultural activities considered here was first given sustained consideration by Communists during the Popular Front era. The Workers' Music Association began life in 1936 with Alan Bush as its first president (Paul Robeson succeeded him) and set out to enlist the support of 'progressive' musicians such as Benjamin Britten and committed Marxists like Hans Eisler. The Association embraced that music in the 'classical' tradition which exhibited some broadly progressive character. The initial idea was to promote such music among the workers and, perhaps more important, associate leading musicians with the call for a Popular Front. The idea that the workers might come to appreciate serious music had diverse enthusiasts in the inter-war years, including the BBC, and it was taken up during the war by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts. For a time the BBC Symphony Orchestra could fill even provincial venues but public interest waned in peacetime and the sort of modernist music which interested the leading composers of the age excluded most followers of 'classical' music, let

alone 'the workers'. After the war the WMA enlarged its scope to include established working-class choral and ensemble work, much of which was resolutely 'middle-brow'. The advent of socialist realism in 1948 put pressure on the Party to bring music into the social struggle directly. But while Prokofiev and Shostakovich could be made to suffer for their 'deviations' from orthodoxy in Russia, a British Party member who liked jazz so much that he regularly wrote about it under an *alias* was untroubled by Soviet denunciations of its 'decadence'.<sup>48</sup> It seems that even the most po-faced Party hack had trouble taking these Russian claims seriously, though J. R. Campbell made the effort on at least one occasion and all reference to jazz was apt to disappear from the pages of Party publications for months at a time. Collet's, the Party bookshop in London, contrived, however, to open its jazz department at the height of the Zhdanov offensive in 1949.<sup>49</sup> In fact, according to Kevin Morgan, Communist musicians had an established relationship with jazz and could be found in nearly every dance band in London during the 1940s. Communists also happened to be the dominant political force in the 30,000-strong Musicians' Union at the same time. There was also a Jazz Appreciation Society with an active Communist presence which was disposed to esteem jazz as an art uncontaminated by the patronage and control of the powers that be. But these glory days were over by the 1950s when neither the relatively popular and commercially successful trad. jazz nor the unpopular *avant-garde* alternative offered anything of specific potential to the Left – not even much of an audience.

Folk music seemed a different proposition.<sup>50</sup> The quest for the quasi-mythical 'mass song', beloved by the Soviet leaders, might yield success down this particular path. The Second Folksong Revival, in which Communists were prominent, was clearly seen by the Party and significant members of it such as Ewan MacColl and Ian Campbell as an opportunity for raising class consciousness. A number of things dovetailed here. The songs were perceived as authentic expressions of working people in economic and political struggle and they were sometimes sung by groups to raise morale, encourage solidarity and generally promote workers' causes. Folk music also represented national traditions and might enhance a national and class consciousness alive to the dangers of the American cultural threat. Songs could be composed in this tradition to politicise people now, or so it was thought. Communists like Harry Boardman in Manchester, Ian Campbell and George Thomson in Birmingham, Ewan MacColl, Bruce Dunnet in London, Leon Rosselson and, most famously, A. L. Lloyd, were prominently involved in folk music whether as performers, composers or collectors. A high point nationally was the collaboration between individual Communists and particular trade unions in producing the award-winning Radio Ballads of 1957-63 broadcast by the BBC – drama-documentaries which put song into the

context of the work and lives of different groups of people. But leaving aside the dubious assumptions involved in seeing folk music as a fertile field for politics, we must also note the sectarian tendencies of some of its champions who disdained the popular music that was actually attracting the bulk of working-class youth in the 1950s.

The WMA did much to assist the folk song revival of the late 1950s but it could do nothing to overcome the obscurity of its leading light in Britain. Alan Bush's post-war operas – *Wat Tyler*, *Men of Blackmoor*, *The Sugar Reapers*, and *Joe Hill* were more likely to be performed in the People's Democracies. Like his fellow enthusiast for socialist realism, Rutland Boughton – whose opera *The Immortal Hour* had been hailed as a work of genius by Edward Elgar – Bush had been radicalised in the 1920s. Both became long-standing members of the Party while other leftish musicians – Benjamin Britten, Elisabeth Lutyens, Alan Rawsthorne, Michael Tippett and others – merely flirted with it in the 1930s.<sup>51</sup> Boughton resigned in 1956, after more than thirty years of Party membership, but Bush stayed on. His early work, much his best work according to the critics, was characterised by 'an individual and rigorous Modernism',<sup>52</sup> as in the string quartet *Dialectic* (1929). But the coming of socialist realism converted him to a folk style of more accessible sounds – drawn from the 'radical pastoral' mode of Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst and other socialist musicians of the 1890s – and the rejection of everything that had made him distinctive. In seeking to communicate with the workers, however, Bush was only successful in countries where he had a captive audience – in eastern Europe – and in common with many of his works his *Song for Gagarin* (1961), inspired by the first cosmonaut, was premiered in the socialist bloc. This failure was not confined to Bush or the music he wrote. The 'folk' song favoured by MacColl attracted only a minority of folk. Communist musicians agonised about the reasons for this. The Communist Choir 'movement' aspired to find the 'mass song' (whatever that was) and worried that its repertoire had become too academic, too modern, too difficult, 'too self-consciously trying to build up the level of working class culture'.<sup>53</sup> Mao Tse-tung was enlisted in the search for an answer, but to no avail.<sup>54</sup> The Communists had set themselves the insoluble conundrum of 'driving out that which is alien and corrupt by encouraging all that is native and life-giving' in the forlorn hope that in 'the struggle with an alien aggressive culture a new socialist people's culture will be born within Britain'.<sup>55</sup> No doubt in drawing on the traditions of the brass bands and the great Northern choirs they also sought to reinforce some of the associational cultures of which they approved. Directing the dynamic and modern forms of popular culture was, of course, beyond them.

The turn to the 'people' and the 'nation' signalled by Zhdanov's speech to the inaugural meeting of the Cominform was also an opportunity for the Party's historians.<sup>56</sup> Class conscious workers had

'deliberately turned their backs on the Union Jack', the symbol of imperialism in the Party's view, but Communists were now fighting to recover British independence and were determined to reawaken the pride of the people in their national traditions and to show that socialist culture had its roots in the cultural traditions inherited from the past. It was necessary for the Scots, Welsh and English Communists to take the lead in defending and developing their respective national roots.<sup>57</sup> Communists had always produced agitational histories intended to be popular, such as A. L. Morton's *A People's History of England* (1938), but in the early 1950s the Party was richer than ever before in academic historians – including Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Maurice Dobb, Roy Pascal, Royden Harrison, Eric Hobsbawm, Edward and Dorothy Thompson, Victor Kiernan, John Saville, George Thomson, George Rudé, and Raphael Samuel. For the next thirty years all these would leave their mark on British historiography. But the Party could also count on equally talented non-academic historians such as Yvonne Kapp, Margot Heinemann, Noreen Branson, and the inspirational Dona Torr, biographer of Tom Mann and translator of Marxist classics. Marxist histories were also written by J. D. Bernal, Joseph Needham, Chimen Abramsky, R. F. Willetts, M. I. Finlay, Gordon Childe, and Benjamin Farrington, some of whom participated in the History Group's activities, as did Basil Davidson and Henry Collins. If there was a collective project uniting most of these talents – the Group was formed with the idea, among others, of preparing a revised edition of *A People's History of England* – the idea of reclaiming a 'history from below' was the dominant one. Neglected by most historians, 'history from below' would highlight the radical-democratic tradition of the English people stretching back to the civil war and beyond. This was the tradition which the Party had situated itself within since the Popular Front period, when the needs of the anti-fascist struggle gave it license to exploit the more creative processes of political and ideological contestation.

In 1979 Hobsbawm recalled that most, if not all of the Party's historians were 'instinctively "popular fronters" ... [who] believed that Marxist history was ... the spearhead of a broad progressive history ... represented by all manner of radical and labour traditions in British historiography'.<sup>58</sup> The Party's historians enjoyed 'a comparative freedom' to get on with this project and 'push forward' the tradition associated with non-Marxists such as R. H. Tawney. The old popular front period had represented an emancipation from some of the cruder manifestations of economic reductionism in Communist thought. It had also aligned the Party with a broader progressive, rationalist current in opposition to the atavistic irrationalism of the fascists. This was useful in the Cold War context too when the enemy's efforts were designed to isolate the Communists by identifying them as freak representatives of a foreign dystopia.<sup>59</sup> The Party replied, in effect, by

claiming itself as the legatee of the popular democratic impulse. How ironic that just as its historians turned to the restitution of this tradition, the times they lived in turned, in their own estimation, to mass apathy, 'privatised' lifestyles, and consumerism. Of course these reactionary tendencies were to be fought partly by remembering the past. One did not need to be an historian to remember the most recent manifestation of popular radicalism during the Second World War, when momentous changes seemed possible. But this memory underlined the sense of defeat in the 1950s and the disappointment represented by both the Cold War and the return of the Conservatives to governmental hegemony.

The Historians' bulletin *Our History* was nevertheless launched in October 1953 as a monthly concerned with 'the historical development of the British people towards our socialist future'. It examined the theme of the English radical tradition ranging across the centuries with articles on Piers Plowman, the Gordon Riots, Peterloo, the Manchester Hall of Science, and various manifestations of 'history from below'. *Democracy and the Labour Movement* (1954) took up similar themes, as did Torr's *Tom Mann and His Times* and Morton's *The English Utopia*. Thompson's *William Morris* was conceived as part of this project as was the journal *Past and Present* which was launched in February 1952. Hobsbawm, Hill, Dobb, Hilton, and Childe all sat on the editorial board of the new journal. Both publications show that the enterprise was complex and even contradictory. Thompson admitted that he wrote *William Morris* in 'an embattled mood, from a position of strong political commitment' and that he sought to address a broad audience which included Left activists. But he acknowledged that it failed to reach as many people as he would have liked, attributing this failure to his own self-indulgence as an author.<sup>60</sup> In fact Thompson did not stint in the intellectual demands he made of his readers. *Past and Present* likewise adhered to the highest academic standards. The challenge to received wisdom in historiography had to be intellectually rigorous if it was to have the desired effect.<sup>61</sup> But success in this enterprise was difficult to reconcile with a mass readership. The historians did not help their cause by having little to say about the twentieth century and one of the consequences of 'history from below' was that the best radical historians of the post-war years neglected to study the ruling elite and its institutions in Britain. When Communist history was rewritten from within the fold by Khruschev the Historians Group registered its dissatisfaction with the Party's response but the Group itself lost most of its leading figures in the aftermath. Hobsbawm, Dobb and Kiernan were among those who remained members and Rudé, R. F. Willetts, and R. S. Neale were among the contributors to *Our History* which continued to reflect the interest in local history that had been one of its concerns since the early 1950s.

The broader question that the Party had to face was the often

repeated argument that the world was changing in such a way, as some of the 1956 dissidents insisted, that the old Leninist doctrines were becoming hopelessly out of date. Even the leadership was forced to consider this possibility which was tirelessly insisted upon, in one form or another, as a self-evident truth – particularly by the Left's enemies. In March 1955, for example, the Executive considered a Party-inspired 'Report of the Commission on the Middle Classes' which was introduced by John Mahon and concerned with the problem of how to achieve the alliance of the middle class and working class that was central to the *British Road to Socialism*.<sup>62</sup> The report supplied detailed quantitative analyses of the growth of the professions between 1921 and 1951, the distribution of the middle classes by occupation and sector of the economy, and their spatial distribution in the country. It noted the growth of white-collar trade unionism. The rapid growth of white-collar occupations was just underway in the year in which the report was delivered but the fact that it was commissioned at all is evidence that the organisation recognised that the changing social structure – which contemporary commentators linked to the ideological consensus – was real and could have political implications. The report inevitably rejected the conventional wisdoms. It recognised nevertheless that the growth of the middle class, estimated as one-sixth of the population, provided opportunities for Conservative propaganda to rail against government bureaucracy, public ownership and the power of the unions. It also identified the middle-class propensities that could be exploited by the Party – including the traditional liberal outlook in relation to world peace and the fears of war now magnified by the new danger of nuclear and biological conflict; then there was suburbia's incipient anti-Americanism over such matters as pornography and the vulgarity of American mass culture; and the shame of the liberal intelligentsia about British colonial repression in countries such as Kenya and Malaya. The Party also came to see that many members of the new middle classes were welfare state employees, arguably with a stake in its further enlargement. All these characteristics could be exploited by Party propaganda. The Party also took the view that the middle class could only grow with recruits from working-class families and that as professional occupations expanded, their status and relative remuneration would shrink, while a trade union outlook would come to prevail among them. In this it was more perspicacious than the prophets of consensus. Coupled with the 'wages movement', the swollen numbers of organised state employees came to be seen as a major problem by the end of our period, one that was making Britain increasingly hard to govern according to the prophets of the New Right.

A related set of concerns focused on 'social democratic theories of contemporary capitalism and society'.<sup>63</sup> This was constantly addressed throughout the period covered by this book and will be returned to in subsequent chapters. Here it is sufficient to observe that the Executive

frequently examined the material basis of British society in search of relevant evidence. It was probably right to reject the argument that changes towards an affluent society characterised by mass consumerism inevitably undermined traditional working-class values – not that many of these values had worked to the Communists' advantage hitherto.<sup>64</sup> But it did monitor other changes. A paper on 'Population Trends and the Party Organisation' received by the Executive in 1960, replete with tables of official statistics, suggested for example, that occupational and demographic trends were working to the Party's disadvantage. Population in the North and Wales had been shrinking slightly since 1948, while numbers in the South East grew, and the region produced above-average rates of job growth. But even within the South East the main area of population growth was on the edge of the London County Council. 'The particular problem we face is that the greatest expansion is taking place in districts where our forces and resources are weak.'<sup>65</sup> Despite this fear the new working class communities that grew in places such as Harlow, Hemel Hempstead, Luton, Letchworth, and Watford seem to have been 'significantly affected by a comparatively large and active Communist presence' at the height of the Cold War.<sup>66</sup>

The Party also had organised rivals to its Left who represented a different, but equally nagging, concern in the 1950s and 1960s. Eric Hobsbawm's report for the Executive on New Left activists in 1958 linked this problem with its worries about the growth of the middle class. Organisationally the movement around *Universities and Left Review* was, he said, 'a complete shambles' that was 'virtually certain to go broke', probably within the next year. But it did have 'a surprisingly firm and lasting mass basis' overwhelmingly composed of middle-class and 'intellectual/artistic' people, better known as 'the left-wing angry-young-men-type'. While there was, Hobsbawm thought, 'the flotsam and jetsam of past politics and the usual lunatic fringe of intellectuals' among them, the *ULR* meetings attracted people who had never been in politics before, especially the young. Hobsbawm argued that:

The *ULR* movement must be seen, not as a product of the crisis in our movement following the 20th Congress, Hungary, etc., like the Peter Fryer *Newsletter*, the defunct Socialist Forums and the *New Reasoner*, but as part of the repoliticisation of middle class and intellectual youth, especially in and around the universities, which has been evident since Suez. Its first sign was the anti-colour bar agitation (S. Africa), then Suez, then the general Angry Young Menism of the left, now the H-bomb agitation. It is an extremely confused and unformed movement, notably weak on organisation and ideology, but unquestionably a real one. It should be regarded much as we regard the H-bomb campaign in general, which has very much the same sort of set-up and in which (Aldermaston) the *ULR* kids have played a prominent part.<sup>67</sup>

Here then was a significant development in radical politics at the end of the 1950s which simply ignored the Party – ‘there is simply no talk about the Party at all among them’, concluded Hobsbawm. After Hungary, he argued, the leaders of this trend ‘went through the usual emotional revision against the Party, common among intellectuals’ but ‘since then they have paid no attention to it, regarding it as negligible. They are more worried about Trotskyists, whom they want at all costs to keep out of too much participation ... because they regard them as wranglers and sectarians who will wreck any movement they are associated with’. The Communists were worried about Trotskyists too but they also had to reckon with the fact, according to Hobsbawm, that if they sought ‘to regain influence, or perhaps try to participate in the movement’ of the New Left many in the *ULR* would take ‘an anti-Party line’. Trotskyist rivals became more of a problem for the Communists in the course of the 1960s when their prominence in demonstrations concerned with the war in Vietnam, their influence in the universities and their presence on Trades Councils were increasingly brought to the attention of the Party leadership.<sup>68</sup> By this time the Party was losing its reputation as the main threat to democratic politics in Britain.

In the culture wars Stalin died twice. After 1953 the Party’s anti-American drive and cultural offensive lost most of its urgency and sectarianism in the wake of Stalin’s death. After 1956 and Khruschev’s partial exposure of Stalinism, the Party not only lost many of its ‘cultural workers’ (some of the culture groups folded up altogether<sup>69</sup>) but now had within the fold people who were far less sure than they had been that all aspects of Soviet life were superior to those of the West. In any case Khruschev was calling for ‘peaceful coexistence’ between capitalism and socialism and the Party gradually began to take its own programme seriously as it got used to the idea. Serious reformism came easily to the Party’s Teachers Group, which attracted hundreds of members and operated under the aegis of the National Educational Advisory Committee and the Industrial Department. It produced *Education Today and Tomorrow* and campaigned in favour of comprehensive schooling and against selection and intelligence testing. In the cultural Cold War it too was enlisted in the fight against American culture – not only its mind-corrupting comics but also teaching techniques such as the ‘self learn’ method which, emanating from the USA, could be damned as only concerned to produce factory fodder. But after 1956 the NEAC increasingly turned its attention to practical issues – in Wolverhampton, for example, Communist teachers monitored the poverty of resources devoted to ethnic minorities, the under-representation of ethnic minorities progressing through the grammar schools and related issues.<sup>70</sup>

The development of the campaign against racism is a good example of the Party’s evolution in the culture wars. Institutionalised racial

inequality had long been identified as one of the most detestable features of the USA. Communists had drawn attention to it since the 1920s but in the 1950s it was especially damning and embarrassing for a country which posed globally as the land of freedom and democracy. One historian has noted that 'The issue of segregation was not marginal to Anglo-American relations: it was widely discussed, widely disliked and, outside official circles, did not enhance the appearance of America in English eyes'.<sup>71</sup> Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1952) was one of the many landmarks of the decade so far as the exposure of American racism was concerned – *Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the historic Supreme Court ruling against segregation, and the calling out of the National Guard to prevent its implementation in Little Rock Arkansas (1957) were others of international note. The emergence of a non-aligned movement of states after the Bandung conference, mostly representing 'people of colour' was one of the reasons why the race issue was so important in the Cold War. The war in Vietnam was another. The propaganda problem for the USA was obvious enough and had been so for many years. When Truman's secretary of state, James F. Byrnes, called for voting rights in the Balkans in 1946, for example, the Russians observed in riposte that the Negroes of his own state of South Carolina would be surprised to hear of his unexpected enthusiasm for universal suffrage.<sup>72</sup> Of course many people denied any moral equivalence between slavery and death in Soviet labour camps and the way the blacks were treated in the USA, but the propagandists of both sides knew that this missed the point. The radio station *Voice of America* broadcast lies about racial equality in the USA in an effort to conceal the truth – painting a picture of economic, social, and political equality which the *Brown* ruling and the conflict in Arkansas rudely exposed. As we saw in chapter one, the persecution of Paul Robeson was one of those opportunities which reflected something of the real situation inside the USA and the Communist Party seized upon it with alacrity.

### RACISM IN BRITAIN

The CP also claimed to be the first political organisation to express alarm at the growing incidence of race discrimination and race prejudice in Britain.<sup>73</sup> At the 22nd congress in 1952 the Communists referred to the 'flagrant and shameful forms of racial discrimination' that were 'causing suffering and indignities to the colonial people'. The congress demanded legislation to make such discrimination a criminal offence and identified housing, jobs, rates of pay and the operation of the 'colour bar' in corporation transport departments as the areas requiring urgent action.<sup>74</sup> Given the culpable neglect of the established parties, this is hardly surprising. Only about 15-20,000 black people lived in Britain before the onset of post-war immigration.<sup>75</sup> It was obvious from the outset that official indifference to the problems

encountered by immigrants would only amplify and multiply their difficulties. Indeed it was suggested in Parliament as early as 1948 that the Communists would be the main beneficiaries of racial tensions, so assiduously did they tend to the needs of the immigrants, by comparison with everyone else.<sup>76</sup> This was in all respects hyperbole, but there is no doubt that the Communist leadership was quick to see the danger of racism at the very start of the 1950s. Indeed the 22nd Congress in April 1952 supported a resolution declaring that 'In Britain flagrant and shameful forms of racial discrimination are practised causing suffering and indignities to the colonial people'. It described the discrimination which they suffered in housing and jobs and drew attention to the operation of a 'colour bar' in corporation transport departments. It demanded legislation that would make such discrimination a criminal offence.<sup>77</sup> The Party argued that the number of new immigrants was consistently exaggerated to create the impression that the country was being flooded with them. It observed that by comparison with displaced persons,<sup>78</sup> who were treated 'lavishly', immigrant workers in 1955 were still 'forced to fend for themselves' and continued to face discrimination in housing and jobs.<sup>79</sup> Over ten years later, now in an age of increasing racist restrictions on immigration, Party propaganda continued to emphasise the mischievous, hypocritical and discriminatory nature of official policy.<sup>80</sup> Throughout the period Communists linked racism in Britain to the racist policies and practices of the British Empire.<sup>81</sup>

The Communists supported Brockway's Bill on Racial Discrimination in 1957 – one of eight occasions on which he was thwarted by Parliament. By its own account the Party had only really begun to take this issue seriously three years earlier when immigration started to increase. All the reliable surveys of opinion were confirming 'that racial discrimination is being exercised against West Indians in securing jobs, homes, and in social life'. While 'in general all public declarations from official authorities are against racial discrimination, it is being applied in practice', the Party complained, 'and no adequate steps are being taken to stop it'.<sup>82</sup> Already in November 1956, Lord Mancroft, Under-Secretary of the Home Office, raised the issue of immigration controls in the House of Lords. The TUC itself paid little attention to racism until the Notting Hill disorder of 1958 and made no formal reference to any aspect of immigration and discrimination before 1955, even though there was plenty of evidence of trade unionists objecting to immigrant labour. In 1956 the TUC General Council – having witnessed the adoption of a resolution demanding special attention to race discrimination at the Southport TUC congress in 1955 – reported to the 1956 congress, advising that steps be taken in the West Indies to discourage emigration. Similarly, while the 1956 conference of the NUR supported equality of opportunity and treatment of all workers, its General Secretary, Jim Campbell, laid the main stress on 'a

controlled reasonable recruitment'.<sup>83</sup> Most trade unions had made no official declaration at all by 1957 but most of those that had were formally against all forms of racial discrimination. The 'main weakness is the failure to carry out any measures to apply this policy in practice', observed the Communists.

In fact the problem of British racism was worse than this suggested. Active malicious racism could be found virtually everywhere. Union members working for the Bristol Omnibus Company, for example, voted to prevent the employment of black bus crews in January 1955, when the Passenger Group of the TGWU in Bristol passed a 'colour bar' resolution.<sup>84</sup> The same ban was adopted that year by busmen in Coventry – there was no infringement of the law, of course, and that was part of the problem. In London private bus companies such as United Counties also operated the system.<sup>85</sup> Inside the NUR – in defiance of resolutions such as the one adopted in 1956 – there were branches intent on excluding blacks from employment at the large rail depots throughout England. There were stoppages of work at Camden, Euston and Kings Cross Goods Yards in response to the recruitment of black workers. In 1950, for example, 17 new black workers were sent to Camden Rails to be trained as shunters only to be rejected by the workforce on the grounds that their recruitment undermined trade union bargaining power.<sup>86</sup> An indication of the depth of prejudice is provided by the fact that the editor of *Railway Review* published an anonymous correspondent in 1961 who claimed that 'Today, in England, the blacks are being paid to breed and they are, to the extent that in a few years there will be 10 million in this island ... those who are here are 80 per cent full of disease, TB etc.'<sup>87</sup> It is to the credit of the Communists that they made a stand against racism and exposed it wherever it occurred and that militants such as Tony Gilbert, who represented the guards and shunters at Camden, campaigned against the colour bar in their local communities as well as their union branches.<sup>88</sup>

The Party itself had formulated a Charter of Rights<sup>89</sup> in 1955 and distributed 100,000 copies of a mass leaflet, together with a pamphlet, *No Colour Bar for Britain*, which had sold 10,000 copies. The *Daily Worker* had run a series of articles towards the end of the year and began 1956 with one or two more. It was largely because of these initiatives that the matter was taken up by the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) and 'steps were taken' to make racism a live issue within the unions. None of this was enough because the problem was getting worse. Many British workers evidently believed, according to the Communists, that immigration undermined their bargaining power, even though immigrant workers were overwhelmingly confined to the lowest paid jobs and white workers often obstructed their promotion. The International Affairs Committee insisted in 1957 that the Party had to demand 'equality of access to employment' and

'equal opportunity of promotion' – a demand missing from the Charter. Not enough initiative was being shown in recruiting West Indians to trade unions – 70 per cent of Caribbean immigrants did not belong to a union. Even in the Movement for Colonial Freedom, which the Committee praised for its 'serious attention' to racial discrimination, 'only the most conscious and active members' had been involved in campaigning. The problem was to create 'an energetic drive to get the whole Labour movement to take energetic action in the matter'. The Bill put forward by Brockway was considered a start. Its terms were 'almost identical with the Charter of Rights put forward in our pamphlet and leaflet two years ago', a Communist memorandum observed. It called for legal penalties against racial discrimination in regard to conditions of employment, rates of pay, housing, and entry to inns, restaurants, dance halls and other public places.

According to the International Affairs Committee, up to 1957 the London District of the Party had shown the most vigour in pursuing the problem of race discrimination. London was where the MCF was chiefly confined, of course, and many of its activists were Party members. But even in London the leadership had 'not succeeded in getting most areas and branches to take serious interest in this problem', while, 'In most other Districts political activity in this field is seriously neglected ... The result is that many Party members also have ideas about "quota schemes" for coloured workers. Certainly, no clear stand is being made for equal rights'.<sup>90</sup> The action that was now recommended had a number of strands: to upgrade the Charter of Rights; instruct the Industrial Department to survey the militants under its guidance so that agreement could be reached on the correct approach to specific problems; get the MCF to focus on the problem of racism in Britain; support Brockway's Bill; encourage the merger of the (eleven) West Indian organisations in Britain with a view to creating a campaigning united front; and begin a new campaign on race discrimination in the *Daily Worker*.

Action was indeed taken, but against the background of a rising tide of racism, much of it encouraged by the press and the political establishment. Conferences on race discrimination inaugurated campaigns to support Brockway's Bill, to encourage multi-racialism in schools, and to assist immigrants with housing, jobs and trade union membership. The MCF and Christian Action also launched a campaign against racism in sport in June 1958 – decades before the relevant authorities showed any interest. Later that year race riots broke out in Nottingham and Notting Hill,<sup>91</sup> injecting even greater urgency into the conferences on race discrimination organised for that autumn by the London Area Council of the MCF, various London Trades Councils and *Labour Monthly*. The murder of Kelso Cochrane in Kensington in May 1958 was the first that was openly acknowledged to have been racially motivated. If such racist attacks was all the work of a small

minority, it implied a major problem in explaining why the political representatives of 50 million people were doing so little about it. Though the black population in 1959 was just 210,000, all the talk in the mainstream press and in government circles was of the need for further controls and restrictions to stem the 'flood'. Blacks were constituted as the problem in official discourse, rather than its victims.

Communists rejected this view and observed that almost every black person 'reported some harassment by policemen' in London as well as evidence of racial discrimination in their daily lives. But it was another decade before effective race discrimination legislation was adopted, and it took forty more years for the Metropolitan police to admit its 'institutionalised racism'. Communists were also ahead of the times in alerting labour movement opinion to the violence that individual blacks experienced at the hands of racists. They were sometimes on the receiving end of it themselves. Immediately after the Nottingham events, for example, Claudia Jones, member of the Party's International Affairs Committee and editor of the *West Indian Gazette*, received an abusive and threatening letter from the 'Ku Klux Klan of Britain'.<sup>92</sup> But when the NCCL held a conference on the colour bar at Friends House in London in November 1959, it was Communist speakers such as Claudia Jones who, undeterred, were among those demanding appropriate legislation.

By 1960 the African National Congress had demanded a boycott of South African goods which the Communist Party in Britain was keen to advance within the unions. Just two months after *Labour Research* announced the opening of this campaign it published its first article on 'Race Hatred and the Law', in which it demanded legislation against race discrimination in Britain. Both Sir Leslie Plummer, the Labour MP for Deptford, and the NCCL were at that time sponsoring bills dealing with racial incitement.<sup>93</sup> But it is significant that this Party-dominated journal had had so little to say about racism before 1960. The International Department's complaints against the Industrial Department's priorities, mentioned above, were seemingly vindicated by the absence of this issue from the pages of *Labour Research*. Similarly the 'Needs of the Hour' model resolutions which the Industrial Department prepared annually for TUC normally had little to say about racism – for example, nothing at all in 1963 and 1964. Even in 1968, while the Party called for repeal of the Immigration Act and appropriate amendments to the Race Relations Act, these 'most important' measures appeared together as item 30 in a list of 36 – and this was the year when Enoch Powell had intervened to further stir up race hatred with his so-called 'rivers of blood' speech.<sup>94</sup> If, as reported by the International Department, some members of the Party had thought the solution lay in immigration quotas it was obvious that race prejudice did not stop outside the organisation. Though the TUC officially condemned racism it was well established that racism was a problem

within many of the unions and that the colour bar operated in some of them with the acceptance of local branches.<sup>95</sup> Though there may have been a tendency to soft-pedal in the struggle against racism, to downgrade it or to simply ignore it, there is also no doubt that individual Communists within the trade unions played a leading role in this area of work. Ken Gill is an example of someone involved in this kind of work; he played a prominent role in the 1980s as chair of the TUC's race committee, but his leadership on this issue on Willesden Trades Council in the late 1950s is less well known. The work of leading Party members such as Kay Beauchamp is recorded in numerous documents; that of the ordinary branch members often is not. But it occasionally comes to light. When black activists in Bristol inaugurated a bus boycott in April 1963 in protest at the local colour bar, local interest and press coverage expanded to national level and the likes of Tony Benn, Fenner Brockway, Sir Leary Constantine and the leader of the Labour Party, Harold Wilson, spoke out against it. But up to this point, according to the Bishop of Bristol's Industrial Mission, only two types of trade union members had opposed the ban – 'Christians and Communists'.<sup>96</sup>

The introduction of the Commonwealth Immigration Bill in November 1961 – denounced as a 'plain anti-colour measure in practice' by Hugh Gaitskell – signalled the beginning of an extraordinary period in British history when the political establishment was forever tightening access to the country and forever failing to achieve its objective; having, therefore, to start all over again but doomed only to fail and thus ensure a continuous narrative about floods of foreigners entering the country. The problem persists to this day. But what does it consist of – incompetence, a growing army of increasingly devious immigrants and foreign scroungers? The public was certainly encouraged to believe the latter but the Communist Party took the view that it was all about racism – pandering to racism and reinforcing it.<sup>97</sup> In December 1961 it was reported in *World News and Views* that the Indian Workers' Association, together with its West Indian and Pakistani counterparts, had agreed to join the Co-ordinating Committee Against Racial Discrimination (CARD) in which the CP, the MCF, various trade unions and university groups were already united. The Commonwealth Immigration Act became law in 1962 and with the exception of the Communists all the political parties capitulated to its provisions.

By now Colin Jordan's National Socialist Movement and the British National Party were actively seeking to exploit the panic about immigrant numbers. Jordan and his followers were among those who disrupted Patrick Gordon-Walker's fight for the seat of Smethwick in October 1964. Though the victorious Tory candidate, the racist Peter Griffiths, was branded as a 'Parliamentary leper' by the new Labour Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, the Government was

keen to demonstrate its anti-immigrant credentials by warning, through the Home Secretary Sir Frank Soskice, that the considerable evasion of immigration controls allegedly taking place would be stopped by a tightening up of entry regulations. According to the Labour MP Emmanuel Shinwell, by this means it would be impossible for the Conservative Party to fight the next election on immigration. The *Daily Worker* warned that this mentality was madness and that the Tories would always be able to outbid Labour on racism.<sup>98</sup> A problem for the Party, however, despite the active interest some of its members had taken on racism since the early 1950s, was that it had failed to penetrate very deeply into the immigrant communities, notwithstanding its long relationship with the Indian Workers' Association.<sup>99</sup> The annual general meeting of the Party's Caribbean Advisory Committee at the beginning of 1966 presents a picture of inactivity and demoralisation even among the few activists it possessed.<sup>100</sup>

In March 1965 the Labour Government announced three new measures – a Bill to deal with racial discrimination, the appointment of Maurice Foley to assist immigrants to become 'fuller citizens' and a Mission to Commonwealth Countries headed by Lord Mountbatten to discuss immigration control problems in an effort to 'stamp out evasion at source'. Wilson's capacity for finding gimmicks did not conceal the seriousness of his concern to stop illegal immigration. The Government claimed that the degree of evasion was 'fatally eroding' the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. By August a White Paper appeared announcing measures to drastically reduce the number of immigrants from the 'new Commonwealth', as it was euphemistically known. Meanwhile the Race Relations Bill was published revealing an utterly toothless measure which excluded from its terms virtually all those areas where race discrimination was most endemic – the police, private hotels, boarding houses, shops, clubs, private tenancies, services such as credit facilities and insurance, and employment practices. All this was pointed out by the Bill's many critics, including the Communist Party. The proposed legislation could not be used against employers or trade unions, local authorities, social clubs, and most public bodies. Communists contrasted this with the law in the Soviet Union where racial discrimination was identified as a criminal offence in the constitution of 1936 (Article 123). Britain's recent record, they pointed out, included such acts as supporting the losing side when the UN Political Committee voted 68 to 5 in condemnation of apartheid (December 1958); refusing to ratify the ILO convention condemning racial discrimination in employment practices (1960); opposing the boycott of South African goods; and pandering to racism in immigration law. The Communists had always linked racism in Britain to British imperialism, but they were no longer content to make such propaganda. They were now

more concerned to stress that effective legislation could change the pattern of behaviour by redrawing the line between what was regarded as acceptable and unacceptable and by contributing to the creation of a more tolerant climate.<sup>101</sup>

In February 1967 a number of fascist groups reorganised as the National Front and almost exactly a year later the new organisation was able to exploit the biggest panic so far about immigration – the exodus of East African Asians to Britain. The Tories immediately demanded stricter controls and the new Home Secretary, James Callaghan, responded with an announcement of new emergency legislation to prevent many British passport holders from Kenya entering Britain. By March 1968 the new Commonwealth Immigration Bill had been enacted. A protest march organised by various immigrant groups, the MCF and the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination mustered just 2,000 people. The political establishment's overt hostility to the new immigrants gave encouragement to racists and while the police initiated large-scale 'sweeps' in search of illegal immigrants, reported racist attacks upon black people increased. Ironically Labour had been planning to amend the Race Relations Act (1965) by plugging some of the more obvious gaps in its provisions. But the Communist Party – John Gollan had written to the then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins on 24 April 1967 – was demanding that the new legislation should also cover complaints against the Crown, the police and public bodies regulated by the Treasury – advice that was ignored.<sup>102</sup> The new Bill was published in April 1968, just days before Enoch Powell compared himself to the Roman who sees the Tiber 'foaming with blood'. In February he had demanded stricter controls on immigration, now he was prophesying civil war.

Powell's call for voluntary repatriation of immigrants on 20 April 1968 was followed days later by a series of strikes involving a total of 10-12,000 workers. Construction workers in Wolverhampton, factory employees in Birmingham and Coventry and most numerous of all, dockers from the West India docks in London were involved in these demonstrations of support. Communist Party members on the docks distributed leaflets denouncing Powell and racism and bravely addressed hostile mass meetings, one of which was described as having a lynch mob mentality.<sup>103</sup> At this time the Party was claiming 75 members on the London docks, up from just 34 in 1966. Most were based at the Royal Albert Group where there was no strike action but the show of support for Powell showed how marginal their influence could be. But even with small numbers of activists a Communist presence could make a difference. The shop stewards committee at Ford Dagenham, for example, which was dominated by the CP, called a pre-emptive mass meeting of several hundred workers which may have helped to prevent a 'Powellite' demonstration at the car factory. It was already clear, however, that the problem of racism was growing and

that something much bigger than the campaigns hitherto was required to combat its active proponents on a national scale.

A fairly clear evolution of cultural policy and outlook is visible in the years between 1951 and 1968. In the early 1950s the Party centre, often in the person of Aaronovitch, was concerned to orchestrate the cultural struggle as a weapon of class conflict along the lines approved by Stalin-Zhdanov.<sup>104</sup> Aaronovitch was moved to other duties in 1955 when the Party's interest in concerting the cultural struggle faded. Reformist activity was of increasing significance after 1956 but there was drift rather than a clear sense of purpose. The various groups continued to service the Party Executive but some ceased to function and others limped along with reduced membership. The Historians, for example, provided public lectures and articles to observe anniversaries; they investigated opportunities for publishing school and university textbooks in 1959 and continued to produce numerous monographs each year. The academics among them, such as Hobsbawm, did less Party work and more history than they had been able to before 1956. Arnold Kettle had told the leadership what they wanted to hear by associating left-wing intellectuals with armchair idealism in 1956. But within a few years of the Khruschev speech and the loss of so many of the Party's intellectuals, the National Cultural Committee was stressing the importance of such members and lamenting the Party's failure (in contrast to its counterparts in Italy and France) to recruit them since the war.<sup>105</sup>

By the beginning of the 1960s the Party leadership was conscious of rival sources of radical thought within the New Left and the rapidly growing social sciences of the universities. In 1961 nearly 40 New Left clubs existed and it was believed that the young were drawn to them, at least in part, because the New Left sought an understanding of the social and cultural changes of contemporary Britain – many of them directly involving and affecting young people. The Party's tendency to treat cultural issues as simple effects of class forces or representations of class interests – or ignore them altogether – had never satisfied all its members as was revealed in 1950 when the *Daily Worker* opened a debate on the matter. But Emile Burns expressed the official view, which closed the debate, by pronouncing that there were two cultures – a rotten bourgeois culture and a progressive socialist culture.<sup>106</sup> This sort of approach would no longer do. Rival Marxist analyses – some inspired by Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1958) and *The Long Revolution* (1961) – were taking on the things that seemed to matter – the new teenage subcultures, the alienation and privatised lifestyles of consumer societies, and the relationship of all of this to 'managed capitalism' and Croslandite social democracy.

There was a felt need within the Party to enter these debates and engage with the people being drawn to left politics. The Party's own

programme stressed the fight against monopoly and the need for progressive alliances embracing most of the population, including intellectuals. But to judge from the number of resolutions concerning cultural issues put before the Party's biennial congress the membership was not as interested in the cultural struggle as the leadership, as was pointed out in the Party's press.<sup>107</sup> Most of the cultural initiatives of this time were top-down. In 1962, for example, a 'Week of Marxist Thought' was planned in emulation of initiatives taken by the Communists of France and Italy. This proved to be the first of many. There was also a series of London Forums in 1962 concerned with Freedom, Monopoly and the Ruling Class, Britain's Schools, Man on the Cinema Screen, Painting and Life, Justice, and ICI versus Coutaulds. Michael Tippett and Alan Bush debated 'What Does Music Express?' in another of these events in 1963, while Basil Davidson joined Jack Woddis and Desmond Buckle to examine the case for an African Road to Socialism.

Party members had begun to see cultural work as a way of 'enriching and enlivening' their work and deepening their own understanding of the world. It was in this spirit that members of the Artists Group met on a regular basis after February 1963 to study aesthetic theory in the work of Kant, Hegel, Theodor Lipps, Croce, Tolstoy, Herbert Read, Gombrich, Hauser, Wilenski, Plekhanov, Lukacs and John Berger.<sup>108</sup> In the same month the Political Committee issued a statement to the National Cultural Committee which said, apropos cultural and scientific work, that 'the position of our Communist Party is that we do not intend to issue any directives at all or to exercise any control over the direction of the comrades' work.' This was a big step away from the position in 1951 even though the statement added that if 'in a painting or a story or a poem a direct political theme was dealt with, we reserve the right to state our view on the politics of that theme'.<sup>109</sup> When a sub-committee concerned with one of the big cultural events of 1963 – 'The Challenge of Marxism' week – came to draw up the names of proposed speakers the list included Michael Foot, A. H. Halsey, Canon Collins and C. P. Snow, as well as the usual Party members. Plans for a week of Marxist debate in 1964, 1965 and 1966 were increasingly concerned to generate real controversy by including the likes of Kenneth Tynan, Fenner Brockway, John Osborne, and Lindsay Anderson, as well as (more dangerously) independent Marxists such Tom Bottomore, Ralph Miliband, Christopher Hill, Michael Posner, and Raymond Williams. NCC events aimed at Party members also show this growing interest in unofficial Marxism.<sup>110</sup> Party intellectuals clearly felt able now to exercise their curiosity. Arnold Kettle's opening address at the 400th anniversary celebrations of Shakespeare's birth in November 1964 set the tone by arguing that the Communists were 'not out to use Shakespeare. It will be enough for us if we make a little progress in understanding and enjoying him.'

Because that will help us to understand and enjoy a bit more of life. And hence change it'.

Popular culture changed rapidly in the early 1960s and for once it seemed to be going in the Party's direction. In 1962 A. L. Lloyd advertised a discussion on the 'Folk Song Revival' by setting 'the authentic stuff of folk tradition' against 'the sterility of commercial popular art' and by stressing the Communists' proprietorial interest in preserving folk as 'a valuable, popular weapon with which to combat the brain-softening commercial culture that the masters think fit for the masses'. This was standard sectarian stuff full of distaste for 'pops and the Twist', the 'coffee-bar cowboys' and 'bobby-socks vogue' of 'almost meaningless, mainly American items made familiar by commercial recordings'.<sup>111</sup> But when the folk purists in the Party kept up this disdain during the wave of protest songs inaugurated by Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary and the rest, even Party loyalists like Betty Reid could see that it made no sense. In a letter to the *Daily Worker* she pointed to the 'wave of pacifism among American youth' that was already visible in 1965 together with the progressive spirit 'which sent the Freedom Riders to the South, swelled the Civil Rights demonstrations and made the students the spearhead of the campaign against the Vietnam war'. 'The King Canutes of folk', as she called them, were missing out the real world as they argued about who was to have the label 'Folk Approved' stamped on their identity cards.<sup>112</sup> There were opportunities for a Marxist party in this era of youth radicalisation if it would only take them – as the rise of CND had shown.

But the Party's more tolerant approach to cultural questions and the role of intellectuals was not just an opportunist response to the changing situation in Britain. It was partly a question of taking the search for allies more seriously, as the Party programme required. But it was also a response to the greater tolerance of artists and writers which the Soviet authorities demonstrated. In 1962 Alexander Solzhenitsyn had been allowed to publish *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*. Though the greater freedom which this event signalled was short-lived, Rumyantsev, the editor-in-chief of *Pravda*, codified aspects of it in his article on 'The Communist Party and the Intelligentsia', published in February 1965. It was reproduced in *Soviet News*, the publication of the Russian embassy in London in March 1965. In March 1966 the French Communist journal *Argenteuil* adopted a similar position. J. R. Campbell began to receive thoughts on 'intellectuals and the Party' in September 1966 from cultural activists such as Brian Simon, Jack Lindsay, John Lewis and Maurice Cornforth. No sense of urgency can be detected in this process but it was finally concluded when the ideas of the cultural experts were put before the Executive in the form of a statement on 'Questions of Ideology and Culture' in March 1967. The Communists now openly welcomed 'all those who have come in one way or another to appreciate the importance of Marxist approaches in

different fields of research'. The statement expressed 'hope' that the Party could 'work closely in discussion and co-operation with them'. Its claims to possession of a monopoly of Marxist prescience was dented if not abandoned; the Party still claimed that its role was to 'speed' and 'lead' the transition to socialism. But it now allowed that science required 'the most critical, enquiring and searching spirit' among its practitioners. The Party would not 'lay down a line' on any aspect of this process and it committed itself to pluralism in the arts before and after the creation of a socialist society. The Communist Party 'does not see its task as being to direct what should be written, painted or composed – either in terms of subject or of style', it now averred.<sup>113</sup>

Another step had been taken away from the Bolshevik outlook forged by Leninist ideology and Soviet practice, though there were members who resisted the change. Katherine Thomson, for example, deplored the statement's 'liberalism' and its 'sense of guilt' in relation to the Lysenko affair, claiming that the new position was 'lame, limp and superficial' compared to Stalin's established clarification of the subject.<sup>114</sup> Some members of the Party may have realised that culture was being divorced from the question of power and its structures as Communists began to recognise its 'relative autonomy' and rediscover a richer, more imaginative language than standard 'Marxism-Leninism' in which to explore it. They may have sensed too that this road entailed surrender of the Party's claims to a unique leadership role, as the relative autonomy of cultural forms and relationships called forth, and became the province of, a corresponding pluralism of special interests and subjectivities. But it was early days yet and the future direction of change could only be guessed at.

## NOTES

1. McShane, *No Mean Fighter*, p27.
2. L. Black, 'The Political Culture of the Left in "Affluent" Britain, 1951-64', PhD thesis, London Guildhall University, 1999, p25.
3. A. Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, Athlone Press, London 1997, pp92-3.
4. See C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1990.
5. CPGB, *Forging the Weapon*, 1961, pp29-31.
6. Edward Thompson lamented the 'slavery of the human soul to material trivia' as a characteristic vice of the 1950s in 'Socialism and the Intellectuals', *Universities and Left Review*, 1, 1957, p34.
7. Mervyn Jones on Bevan interviewed by Black, 'The Political Culture', p247 footnote.
8. See S. Parsons, *Communism in the Professions: the Organisation of the British Communist Party Among Professional Workers, 1933-56*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1990, p290.
9. 'The American Threat to British Culture', conference held at the Holborn Hall, London, 29 April 1951. Proceedings reproduced in *Arena: A*

- Magazine of Modern Literature*, Vol. 2, No 8, new series, June/July 1951. See S. Aaronovitch, 'The American Threat to British Culture', *World News and Views*, 12 May 1951, p215.
10. Ibid, p4.
  11. Ibid, p13.
  12. Ibid, p34.
  13. 'E.P. Thompson, 'William Morris and the Moral Issues To-Day', ibid, pp25-30 and p28.
  14. E. P. Thompson, *The Struggle for a Free Press*, People's Press, London 1952, p17 and p23.
  15. R. Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War Two*, Basic Books, New York 1997, p156.
  16. F. Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, Granta, London 1999, pp165-89.
  17. R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, p524.
  18. See A. Sinfield, *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, Athlone Press, London 1997, p106.
  19. R. Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life With Special Reference to Publications and Entertainments*, first published in 1957 by Chatto and Windus, Peregrine Books, Harmondsworth 1984, pp246-50.
  20. Ibid, pp62-3.
  21. A person might be overlooked for promotion or prevented from obtaining a job because of Party membership – though this was inevitably difficult to prove – but it was rare for someone to be dismissed because of it. Andrew Rothstein's contract as a lecturer in the School of Slavonic and East European Studies was not renewed in 1950 on the grounds of 'inadequate scholarship'. The case generated some controversy about academic freedom. See W. H. Burston, 'Academic Freedom and the Communists', *Universities Review*, 23, 3, May 1951, pp188-94 and E. Burton, 'Academic Freedom and the Communists', *Marxist Quarterly*, April 1954, pp104-116. Burston argued that 'most Communist are missionaries who are either unable or unwilling to suppress their own views' but perfectly capable of suppressing the truth. Burton – the pseudonym adopted for the occasion by Ralph Russell – belatedly replied for the Party after an earlier riposte by Ronald Meek (late a professor of Economics at Leicester University) was deemed inadequate by the Party. In 1953 the University of London Convocation adopted a resolution expressing its disquiet and recommending an independent enquiry by 128 votes to 20. See R. Russell, *They Think I Lost, I Think I Won*, unpublished autobiography, 1995.
  22. Bert Hogenkamp produced a comprehensive filmography for *Communist History Network Newsletter*, October 1997, c/o Kevin Morgan, Department of Government, University of Manchester.
  23. 'Yorkshire Cultural Conference', *World News*, 33, 13, 28 March 1953.
  24. *World News*, 33, 29, 25 July 1953.
  25. See C. Waters, *British Socialists and the Politics of Popular Culture, 1884-1914*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1990.

26. M. Milligan, 'Edinburgh People's Festival', *Communist Review*, March 1952, pp85-89.
27. Dr Joan Carritt, school doctor and secretary of the Party's Children's Committee gave this address. See *World News*, 33, 48, 5 December 1953.
28. Bert Baker, 'The Third Cultural Conference', *World News*, 33, 40, 10 October 1953.
29. See the excellent study by G. Werskey, *The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the 1930s*, Allen Lane, London 1978, p313.
30. S. Parsons, *Communism in the Professions: the organisation of the British CP among professional workers, 1933-56*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 1990, p326.
31. *The Times*, 6 and 7 April 1956.
32. P. Hogarth, *Drawing on Life*, David and Charles, London 1997, p26.
33. P. Hogarth, 'Afterword', in A. Croft (ed.), *A Weapon in the Struggle*, Pluto, London 1998, p307.
34. Lessing, *Walking in the Shade*, p108 and p85.
35. A. Croft, 'Authors Take Sides: Writers and the Communist Party, 1920-56', in G. Andrews (ed.), *Opening the Books*, Pluto, London 1995, p98.
36. B. Moss, 'The Weapon of Culture', *World News*, 33, 39, 3 October 1953; see also 'Factory Libraries' in *World News*, 33, 5, 31 January 1953.
37. Lessing, Hogarth, Swingler, Lindsay, and Montagu Slater were among them.
38. J. Berger, 'Definitions', *Artists Group Bulletin*, 2, October 1954. Berger eventually published *The Success and Failure of Picasso* in 1965 which was hailed in the *Observer* as 'one of the most stimulating books on art to appear for years', though its critics lamented that Berger's cleverness had been harnessed to a dubious cause. See B. Niven, 'John Berger: Success and Failure of Picasso', *Marxism Today*, January 1966, pp10-15.
39. G. Whiteley, 'George Fullard, sculptor 1923-1973', *Communist History Network Newsletter*, October 1996, p3.
40. Ilya Ehrenburg criticised Hogarth for betraying genuine art in the Soviet Union. Hogarth, *Drawing on Life*, pp48-9.
41. Paul Hogarth and Naim Attallah in conversation in *The Oldie*, August 1999.
42. Parsons, *Communism in the Professions*, p360.
43. *Realism*, 3, April 1956.
44. *Realism*, 5, August-September 1956.
45. Hogarth, *Drawing on Life*, p45.
46. Berger's best known study was *Ways of Seeing* but his *Success and Failure of Picasso* made a big impact and he was a contributor to many left journals such as the *New Statesman* and *Labour Monthly* in the 1950s. Berger's *Art and Revolution* (1969) shows his eventual adoption of a Trotskyist critique of the Soviet Union.
47. S. Aaronovitch, 'The Communist Party - Cultural Work as Mass Work', *World News*, 33, 1, 3 January 1953.
48. Hobsbawm wrote on jazz under the alias Francis Newton.
49. See K. Morgan, 'King Street Blues: Jazz and the Left in Britain 1930s-1940s', in Croft (ed), *A Weapon in the Struggle*, p137.
50. See the interesting essay by G. Porter, 'The World's Ill-Divided: the

- Communist Party and Progressive Song' in Croft (ed), *A Weapon in the Struggle*, pp171-189.
51. Lutyens and Tippett were briefly members on the Party's literary fringes. See R. Hanlon and M. Waite, 'Notes from the Left: Communists and Classical Music', in Croft, *Weapon in the Struggle*, pp68-88.
  52. *Ibid.*
  53. P. Matravers, 'Song for the People', *World News and Views*, 17 February 1951, p84. The small Workers' Music Association Choir, formed in 1941, was successful in various music competitions until 1953 when it went into decline. See *World News*, 5, 37, 1958, p558.
  54. A. Bush and J. Hasted, 'Music in the Fight for Peace and Socialism', *World News and Views*, 5 May 1951, pp206-7.
  55. E. P. Thompson, 'America Attacks British Culture', *World News and Views*, 23 June 1951, p279.
  56. See CP/HIST/2/6; and D. May, 'Work of the Historian's Groups', *Communist Review*, May 1949, pp541-3 and B. Schwarz, "The People" in History: The Communist Party's History Group, 1946-56' in R. Johnson, G. McLennan, B. Schwarz and D. Sutton (eds), *Making Histories*, London, Hutchinson, 1982, pp44-96. A full study is H. J. Kaye, *The British Marxist Historians*, Verso, London 1984.
  57. G. Thomson, 'Our Cultural Work in the Light of Our Party Programme', *Communist Review*, September 1951, pp272-276.
  58. 'An interview with Eric Hobsbawm', *Radical History Review*, 19, 1978-9, p116.
  59. See R. Samuel, 'British Marxist Historians', *New Left Review*, 120, 1980, p74.
  60. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Merlin, London, second edition 1977, ppix-xi.
  61. Hobsbawm and Thompson both stressed this point. See 'Interview with Eric Hobsbawm', p115, and 'Interview with E. P. Thompson', *Radical History Review*, 3, 4, 1976, p7.
  62. EC meeting 12/13 March 1955, CP/CENT/EC/09/17.
  63. The suggested agenda for the September 1957 Executive included this subject.
  64. See on this N. Tiratsoo, 'Popular Politics, Affluence and the Labour Party in the 1950s', in A. Gorst, L. Johnmann, W. Scott Lucas (eds), *Contemporary British History 1931-1961*, 1991.
  65. 'Population Trends and the Party Organisation', CP/CENT/EC/07/03.
  66. N. Fishman, review of H. Horne, *All the Trees Were Bread and Cheese: The Making of a Rebel*, in *Communist History Network Newsletter* 7, April 1999, p10.
  67. Hobsbawm, 'Some Notes about the ULR', p2.
  68. 'Points on Trotskyist Activities in Demonstrations', CP/CENT/ORG/11/7.
  69. Such as the small Psychologists Group which had contained Brian Kirkhma, Monte Schapiro, who worked with Eysenck, Jack Tizard, and Neil O'Conner.
  70. Parsons, *Communism in the Professions*, pp494-8.
  71. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, p525.
  72. W. L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-61*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997, p129.

73. K. Beauchamp, 'Racialism in Britain Today and How to Fight it', *Marxism Today*, 11, 7, July 1967, pp197-206. The universality of race discrimination in Britain was the theme of A. H. Rulmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain*. See the review by Adam Curle in *New Statesman*, 3 April 1954, p443. See also, 'Coloured Barred - A Nigerian in Yorkshire', *Labour Monthly*, January 1955. Internal documents bearing on the Party's work on this issue include 'Coloured Workers in Britain', 7 January 1955, which pointed to the ubiquity of 'colour prejudice' in Britain and 'Report on the work of the International Department', March 1960, which points to work undertaken in this area.
74. 'Resolutions and Proceedings', 22nd Congress, 11-14 April 1952, CP/CENT/CONG/08/01.
75. D. Watson, 'Research Note: Black Workers in London in the 1940s', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, number 1, March 1996, pp149-58.
76. D. Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics, 1945-61*, Clarendon, Oxford 1971, p146.
77. 'Resolutions and Proceedings', p4, 22nd Congress, 11-14 April 1952, CP/CENT/ORG/08/01.
78. In 1955 these included 165,000 Poles and 110,000 Germans.
79. 'Facts on the Colonies', May 1955, CP/CENT/73/01.
80. 'Statistics on Commonwealth Immigration', 9 September 1966, CP/CENT/INT/68.
81. This was the argument in Dutt's 'Britain's Colonies and the Colour Bar', *Labour Monthly*, December 1958, pp530-2, and in Kay Beauchamp's, 'Who is Fostering Race Hatred?', *World News and Views*, 6, 24, 13 June 1959, pp282-3, and her 'Racialism in Britain Today and How to Fight it', *Marxism Today*, 11, 7, July 1967, pp197-206.
82. 'West Indians in Britain', March 1957, CP/CENT/INT/73/01.
83. *Railway Review*, September 1956 quoted in *ibid*, p3.
84. M. Dresser, *Black and White on the Buses*, Bristol Broadsides, Bristol 1986, p12.
85. J. Thakoordin and T. Gilbert, *Eradicate Racism, a murderous crime*, Liberation, London 1985, p12.
86. Tony Gilbert, who fought with the International Brigade and served on the London Area Council of the MCF, recalls these incidents in his 'Black Railway Workers in London in the 1950s' in Thakoordin and Gilbert, *Eradicate Racism*, p18. Buzz Johnson argues that from the early days of West Indian immigration 'sharp struggles by progressive trade unionists, led by Communists, had to be waged for hiring and upgrading West Indian workers, for their right to work in booking offices, or as shuttle-plate workers in railway depots or for West Indian women to be employed as "clippies" or bus conductors'. B. Johnson, *I Think of My Mother*, Karia Press, London 1985, p147.
87. Quoted in B. Pinder, 'Trade Unions and Coloured Workers', *Marxism Today*, 5, 9, September 1961, p282.
88. The campaign succeeded in persuading Camden Railwaymen's Social Club to cancel orders from brewers whose pubs operated the colour bar and informed them officially, through the NUR, that all railwaymen's clubs in London would do likewise unless race discrimination stopped. See Gilbert, 'Black Railway Workers', pp24-6.

89. This demanded, *inter alia* and well ahead of officialdom, 'No form of colour discrimination by employers, landlords, publicans, hotel proprietors, or in any respect of social, educational and cultural activity.' It also demanded 'Opposition to all Government restrictions and discrimination against coloured workers entering Britain' and 'Equality of treatment in access to employment, promotion, wages and conditions ...'
90. 'West Indians in Britain', p6.
91. Apropos the Notting Hill riot Douglas Rogers, reporting for *Prod* (October 1958), said 'I was shocked at the extent of the anti-coloured feeling amongst the general population in that area'. The TUC congress was in its final day at Bournemouth before it could respond by stressing, rather lamely, 'that it is the duty of trade unionists and all other responsible citizens to aid the authorities in preventing a recurrence of such disorderly and dangerous demonstrations'.
92. K. Beauchamp, 'Labour Movement Must Act', *World News and Views*, 13 September 1958, p557. Kay Beauchamp quotes Herbert Hill, Labor Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, who on a visit to London in 1959 informed the *New Statesman* (9 May) of the extent of police racism as reported to him by West Indians in North Kensington, pp282-3.
93. *Labour Research*, 49, 1 and 3, January and March 1960, pp1-2 and pp49-50 respectively.
94. The Needs of the Hour documents can be found in CP/CENT/IND/12/07.
95. B. Pinder, 'Trade Unions and Coloured Workers', *Marxism Today*, 5, 9, September 1961, pp282-86.
96. Dresser, *Black and White*, p13, p26 and p46. The Communist Party also vigorously pressed the issue in the council elections of May 1963.
97. *World News and Views*, 9, 1, 1 January 1962.
98. *Daily Worker*, 10 March 1965, p1.
99. The Indian Workers Association was formed in Coventry in 1938 but post-war immigration reinvigorated it in Southall, Coventry and Birmingham in the mid-50s. Its mainly Communist leadership ensured that the CPGB had links with the organisation – in Wolverhampton, for example, George Barmsby was the link man, though the Wolverhampton Communist Party also had its own Indian Group averaging a dozen members in the 1960s. Up to 1966 in every town where there was a large Punjabi community there were separate CP branches – the regular and the Indian branch. Greek Cypriots in London also operated separate branches, in part to keep their community alive. Indian CP branches had similar functions. They conducted their business in Punjabi and directed their own activities. See J. De Witt, *Indian Workers' Associations in Britain*, OUP, London 1969.
100. 'Annual General Meeting of Caribbean Advisory Committee', 21 January 1966, CP/CENT/INT/68.
101. Compare Dipak Nandy's 'Discrimination and the Law', *Labour Monthly*, January 1967 and R. C. Lockett's 'Trade Union Congress (2) – Racial Discrimination', *Labour Monthly*, October 1967 with D. N. Pritt's 'Behind These Race Riots', *Labour Monthly*, October 1958.

102. 'Race Relations Bill', International Department, April 1968, CP/CENT/INT/67/07.
103. See F. Lindop, 'Racism, and the working class: strikes in support of Enoch Powell in 1968', *Labour History Review*, 66, 1, Spring 2001 and K. Lunn, 'Complex Encounters: Trade Unions, Immigration and Racism', in A. Campbell, N. Fishman, J. McIlroy, *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics*, Volume 2, pp70-90.
104. The minutes of the Historians Group, 1951-54, (CP/CENT/CULT/05/12) show that Aaronovitch was important in coordinating and overseeing the cultural struggle.
105. 'First Draft Outline Report on Winning Intellectuals to the Party', nd., probably 1959, CP/CENT/CULT/ 1/4.
106. *Daily Worker*, 4 September 1950 cited by S. Woodhams, *History in the Making*, Merlin, London 2001, p173.
107. F. Small, 'Let Culture Help us Understand Socialism', *World News*, 8, 37, 1961.
108. The bibliography cites the work of the first three in the original German, CP/CENT/CULT/1/6.
109. Minutes of the NCC 11/2/1963, CP/CENT/CULT/1/6.
110. The agenda for 1964 included sessions on 'Trends in Psychology', 'Trends in Film' (others in the series included Architecture, Sociology, and Economics), 'Alienation and the Early Marx', 'Theoretical Science' and 'The Necessity of Art'.
111. NCC leaflet, CP/CENT/CULT/1/5.
112. *Daily Worker*, 26 September 1965.
113. 'Questions of Ideology and Culture', EC statement 11 March 1967, CP/CENT/CULT/3/9.
114. In a letter to Brian Simon contained in *ibid*.

## 4. Internationalism: The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire

It is becoming clear that rigorous maintenance of the presently accepted policies of His Majesty's Government at home and abroad is placing a burden on the country's economy which is beyond the resources of the country to meet ... A choice of the utmost difficulty lies before the British people, for they must either give up, for a time, some of the advantages which a high standard of living confers upon them or, by relaxing their grip on the outside world, see their country sink to the level of a second-class power, with injury to their essential interests and way of life of which they can have little conception (Anthony Eden, June 1952).<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 1952 Palme Dutt put the finishing touches to his *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, an attempt to explain the political economy of post-war Britain in terms of the 'general crisis of capitalism'. Dutt's conclusion was not far removed from Sir Anthony Eden's. Naturally it contained the usual Soviet 'Needs of the Hour' – these reflecting the state of the Cold War during the period of the book's composition. In the Communist view the crisis affecting Britain was, in Dutt's words, 'an integral part of the era of social change through which we are living'. It was the crisis of the imperialist epoch identified by Lenin in 1916, an epoch of wars, civil wars and revolutions. 'The special crisis of Britain and Western Europe', according to Dutt, was simply 'the crisis of the imperialist system, upon which the economy of these countries has been built up, and which is now approaching bankruptcy'.<sup>2</sup> This theory provided the framework within which the particular crises and conflicts of Britain and the British Empire-Commonwealth were understood by Communists in the 1950s. Woven into it was the Cominform-inspired vision of American imperialism as dual sponsor and antagonist of British imperialism, the British Empire having survived only under the suzerainty and control of Washington. Most of Dutt's empirical evidence was taken from the colonial policies of the recent Labour Government – policies guided by the belief that Britain's Great Power status, as well as its immediate post-war reconstruction, depended upon the economic development of its overseas possessions.

In some important respects the Communist position as outlined by Dutt was completely wrong. It is easy to see now that the 'socialist bloc' was not going from strength to strength as Dutt supposed; it had not already demonstrated, as Communists believed, that racism, chauvinism and economic backwardness could be overcome by Soviet-style socialism; Britain and the West did not depend on colonial possessions for their prosperity; the capitalist system was not in any meaningful sense moribund; the right-wing Labour and trade union leaders did not dominate the 'movement' because of imperial super-profits and the supposedly related financial corruption of a layer of the working class; the revolt of the colonial and dependent peoples was not 'the most powerful driving force, in unity with the revolt of the working class in the capitalist countries, in the transition from capitalism to socialism'. The surplus required for overseas investment did not depend historically on the success of British exports of manufactured goods, as Dutt supposed, but was generated by the financial and commercial sector itself.<sup>3</sup> This is already a formidable list of mistaken assumptions and it could be extended further.

We cannot explore all the reasons why such mistaken arguments were easy to believe for Communists and others on the Left, but it is worth pointing out that plenty of empirical evidence had been generated since 1914 to support the theory of general crisis, and a succession of colonial wars in the 1950s helped to keep Lenin's vision alive, as did the threat of nuclear war. Dutt's analysis is of most interest, however, in explaining the Communist view of Britain. Enfeebled by two world wars Britain, in the Party's perspective, was only allowed to keep its colonial possessions in exchange for a heavy contribution to the US-led struggle against world socialism. Its military expenditures exceeded its economic weight, proportionately speaking. But a global military role was, in the Party's view, also the corollary of Britain's privileged access to a world-wide system of unequal exchange, based on the ruthless exploitation of colonial labour. For the Communists British colonialism presented a 'picture of continuous social and economic *deterioration* of all countries brought within its orbit'.<sup>4</sup> The system was run by people who knew that the prosperity of the British depended on Empire, and though they rarely admitted it publicly, there were exceptions, such as Ernest Bevin, who occasionally blurted it out. Indeed it was under the Labour Government lately expired, which Bevin bestrode, that the system of imperial exploitation reached new heights of intensity and new depths of 'parasitic dependence on overseas tribute', exacerbating the neglect and decay of home industry and agriculture. It was during this period that colonial wars erupted in Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia, with the otherwise over-stretched British somehow finding the motivation and resources to lend a helping hand in the restoration of Dutch and French colonialism, while simultaneously attending to their own bloated overseas commitments.

Dutt was quite right to argue that the British Government attached increased importance to Africa in the late 1940s and early 1950s, both as a site for military bases and as a resource to be exploited. He pointed to the greatly increased output and returns from colonial raw materials and to the appropriation of the dollar earnings and the related growth of the sterling balances owed by Britain to its dependencies. He stressed that the Marshall Plan Committee had factored-in the growth of colonial exploitation as part of its calculations concerning the economic restoration of Western Europe and the rectification of its balance of payments deficit with the USA. He was right to suspect that plans had been laid to link West European economic integration to a more systematic exploitation of the region's colonial resources, though he did not realise that Britain's ambitions in this direction had been abandoned as unrealistic in Cabinet in 1949.<sup>5</sup> He quoted statements from almost the entire Labour Cabinet as well as documents such as the *Labour Party's Plans for Western Europe* (1948) to show the importance that was now attached to African economic development. But he observed that the capital required to realise these plans was wanting, while the reality on the ground continued to be social and environmental degradation and the exclusion of Africans themselves from the discussions about their future.

Dutt showed that in spite of the Commonwealth Development and Welfare Acts (1940, 1945, 1950) and the Overseas Resources Development Act of 1948, the net flow of capital moved from the colonies to Britain, not the other way around. Though the official image of British 'philanthropy' survives in modern histories of the period, recent research supports the view that the exploitation of Britain's African colonies became more systematic and injurious to Africans during the late 1940s and early 1950s.<sup>6</sup> The Labour Party's role in this was quite fundamental. Dutt said that Labour Imperialism was 'the central problem of the British labour movement and of British politics'.<sup>7</sup> The Attlee Government had succeeded in entrenching the labour aristocracy on the Boards of 'nationalised' industries, colonial development schemes and other quangos, as we should now call them. Its representatives, according to Dutt, enjoyed the incomes and lifestyle of big business directors. The Communist Party might stress such things as austerity, rationing, wage controls and economic decline as the prevailing characteristics of British life but the old Leninist argument about the labour aristocracy survived:

The economic basis of Labour Imperialism ... lies in the temporary superior privileged conditions of a section of the working class and its leadership sharing in a fragment of the super-profits obtained from the exploitation of the vast mass of the workers on a world scale.

Dutt even argued that 'The majority of the workers in an imperialist country share *unconsciously* in the exploitation ... of the colonial

peoples', though he added that the benefits were small. The 'plums' went to 'the upper section of the labour bureaucracy' and it was in 'this stratum that the alliance with the capitalist class reaches full consciousness and open theoretical expression in the shape of Labour Imperialism or Right-wing Social Democracy'.<sup>8</sup> This stratum had the special role, in the phase of imperialist crisis, of propagandising for colonial policies and executing them when in office. Arthur Creech Jones, the former Colonial Secretary under Attlee, and Rita Hinden, secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, were specimen types of the modern apologist for Empire in the view expressed by Dutt.

The Communists clearly wanted it both ways. While maintaining that a majority of the British benefited from the imperial booty, they also argued that: 'the cost of maintaining the Empire of domination and exploitation is imposing on the masses of the British people ever heavier burdens of taxation, higher prices and lowered standards' as well as colonial wars and the threat of nuclear war.<sup>9</sup> The Communists were keen to show that the growth in the British military budget after 1948 was ruinous of living standards and social services. Defence spending reached 14 per cent of national income in the projected three-year expenditure plans of 1950, when £4,700 million was finally agreed upon as the appropriate spending target in consultation with the USA. In 1951 the incoming Conservative Government was forced to scale this down, though Britain continued to carry the heaviest burden of spending on arms in the world in proportion to population. The term of national conscription was twice increased despite the chronic 'manpower shortage' of the period. An 'independent nuclear deterrent' was sought throughout the 1950s and the British Isles themselves were dotted with American military bases.

From the Communist perspective these burdens represented the cost of NATO, a sectional military alliance whose very existence was in breach of the prohibition on such instruments contained in the United Nations Charter. NATO was nothing more than 'the Bloc of Imperialism' dominated by the USA. The UN machinery had already been subordinated to this bloc, according to the propaganda of the early Cominform period, and was fast reaching out to embrace fascist and semi-fascist states such as Spain, Greece and Turkey. By 1951 it was evident that a rearmed West Germany and Japan had become part of the equation. The protestations that NATO was a defensive alliance were belied in the Communist view by the wars in Malaya, Burma, Indonesia, Vietnam, Korea and Greece. It was in any case clear that the real effort was to be directed against the Soviet Union – a state which according to the Communists had demobilised since 1945 and, in contrast to the USA and Britain, was engaged in no hostilities abroad. Despite the anti-Soviet unity of the 'Western bloc', the preponderance of the USA within NATO was so outstanding, in the Communist view, that American expansion at the expense of the British and other

European empires was only to be expected. The encroachment of the USA in Turkey, Greece, Iran and Egypt was taken as early evidence of this forecast. Britain, for its part, had learned to play second fiddle to the USA, in the expectation that this was the only way of keeping its world role. 'Client satellite status', was how this was described, with 'permanent organs of American economic supervision in Britain' since the advent of Marshall Aid, together with military occupation from 1948. By 1949 the Atlantic Pact 'drew Britain formally into an armed satellite coalition under effective American control'.

At the beginning of the 1950s Britain's routine overseas commitments included the possession of military bases in around 20 countries together with air bases in 19 states. Thus:

with a crippled economic situation, a chronic deficit on the balance of payments, and dwindling reserves [Britain] is subjected to a fatal strain on its resources and man-power in the endeavour to maintain its gigantic burden of world military commitments associated with an empire extending over one-quarter of the globe.<sup>10\*</sup>

This criticism can still be found in recent academic literature.<sup>11</sup> But whereas some historians regarded Britain's overseas ambitions as an expression of *folie de grandeur*, Dutt and the Communist Party perceived these commitments as both the consequence of its alliance with the USA and as the instrument of British monopoly capitalism in its quest for overseas super-profits. The somewhat strained Communist argument was that while the monopolists benefited from this policy (and the labour aristocracy too) the cost to the British people outweighed any benefits that accrued to the national economy. Quite how this squared with the claim that a majority of workers *unconsciously* shared in the fruits of colonial exploitation, Dutt never made clear.

The incoherence of the economic argument hardly mattered in some respects, however. There was enough truth in aspects of the theory to supply a wealth of useful propaganda for the Party. Britain had become the USA's 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' in the process of accepting dollars in order to prop up its faltering overseas dominion. Subjection to American domination had turned it into a target for nuclear retaliation from the Soviet Union. This much was clear. Britain was also expected to bear a disproportionate burden in the wars against communism and national liberation overseas. This in turn required a disproportionate military budget. Yet it was a time of rationing, manpower shortages, shortages of building materials and fuel, wage freezes, and balance of payments deficits. It could be reasonably expected that the Party might make political capital out of these problems. The ideologues such as Dutt expected more. It was their conviction that these problems were not simply the legacy of the war

and the ongoing costs of the Cold War, they were the symptoms of the terminal crisis of imperialism. In Dutt's words 'the whole economic and social structure of Britain' had been built on the assumption of the viability of imperialism. But the funds for capital export – the 'key economic driving force of imperialism' – were drying up. As imports grew – reflecting the weakening industrial and trade position of Britain – they ate more and more into 'the world tribute income', the invisible trade income from foreign investments, financial commissions and commercial services. Soon nothing would be left over for the export of capital to maintain and develop capital accumulation overseas. A process of disaccumulation would begin.

The analysis thus provided additional reasons to expect some sort of economic crash – additional that is to the expected crisis of underconsumption which the Party predicted annually after 1948. The argument also suggested that Britain would resort to ever more drastic methods to intensify colonial exploitation. Colonial wars were thus forecast, as well as explained, by the theory. All sorts of perennial problems of the British economy were additionally connected to the foreign policy of the ruling class. Wage restraint and social retrenchment at home, for example, condemned in Communist industrial propaganda as an attack on working-class living standards, could also serve as evidence of the desperate search for a balance of payments surplus for the purpose of strengthening imperialism. The balance of payments deficit – eliminable by a massive scaling down of overseas military expenditure, which the interests of the monopolists made impossible – must nag away as part of the rationale for wage restraint instead. The manpower shortage, which might have been addressed by having fewer workers in uniform and munitions, could not be tackled this way. The much advertised dollar aid which Congress approved in the summer of 1946 was frittered away on Government overseas expenditure – instead of domestic industrial regeneration – partly because, as G. D. H. Cole explained in the *New Statesman*: 'the very existence of the loan has enabled the Americans to impose on us obligations which we should otherwise have been forced to reject, because they would have been altogether beyond our immediate power'.<sup>12</sup>

Of course the Communists could not admit that tens of millions of West Europeans feared the USSR and had no desire to embrace the Soviet system. They were unable to see that the American dominance of the 'West' sprang at least in part from consent, that in Western Europe in particular the USA owned an 'empire' by invitation.<sup>13</sup> Instead they saw it as 'a Colossus with feet of clay' whose strength was 'not rooted in the people'. In one telling of the tale, imperialism would collapse under the weight of its own contradictions and at a stroke eliminate the 'problem' of social democracy. But there was no question of waiting for this to happen, there was too much that could be done incrementally in the interim. The first task was to agitate for the end of

the alliance with the USA. The break up of NATO, which this entailed, was one of the primary goals of Soviet foreign policy. Another priority was ending the wars in Korea, Malaya and Vietnam. Campaigning for British independence from the USA and for world peace were thus high on the British Party's agenda. Agitation for negotiations leading to a Five-Power Peace Pact and the all-round reduction of armaments accompanied these campaigns. Other issues also promised to be popular. Atomic and chemical and bacteriological weapons of mass destruction could be identified as 'criminal' and worthy of complete prohibition. A united, peaceful, neutralised Germany was Soviet policy; so was preventing the remilitarisation of Japan. These policies had potential in terms of their alliance-building capacities in Britain, as did the demand for the liberation of Britain from foreign (American) armed occupation. Such issues might exploit a patriotic vein. Trade unionists might respond to the call for more trade with Eastern Europe, Russia and China. Britain, it was said, needed to develop trade with those countries able to supply food and raw materials in return for manufactures. The Communist bloc – with its rapid economic growth – was thus the perfect trading partner. All this could be fought for while the national liberation movements went about their business of bringing imperialism to its knees.

The basic positions outlined by Dutt in *The Crisis of Britain* continued to inform Communist discussions of imperialism until events overtook them. Sustained Western affluence in the face of rapid decolonisation after 1960 changed the nature of the argument. The major changes in the patterns of British trade and capital exports recorded by 1968 showed an increasingly inter-capitalist pattern. Far from supporting Western living standards, former colonies began to look irrelevant to the world economy. The Communist vision of what was happening in the 'Third World' and how it related to imperialism certainly lost coherence. By 1968 there were new theories and rival radical movements associated with Franz Fanon, Paul Baran, the ideas of *dependencia* and 'underdevelopment' and rival tactics associated with Maoism and Latin American guerillaism – a 'revolution in the revolution'. The Party's International Department shrank in the 1960s, certainly in terms of its active sub-committees.

In the late 1950s, however, when the work of the Department grew annually, the Party clung to its idea that imperialism was making a last ditch attempt to rescue itself at the expense of Africa.<sup>14</sup> The various imperialist powers were still said to be 'torn by sharp contradictions', but intent on containing and controlling the national liberation movements – as witnessed by the wars in Algeria and Vietnam. Britain continued to cling to the USA in order to keep its empire.<sup>15</sup> The new factor, especially after the Bandung Conference of 1955, when many former colonies asserted their 'non-aligned' foreign policies in the Cold War, was Soviet foreign policy's belated realisation that the newly

independent states could be diplomatically useful. This was dressed up in terms of the growing magnetic power of an economically successful socialist bloc.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT**

It was the International Department which was responsible for keeping the Party informed about developments in all parts of the world.<sup>16</sup> It maintained contacts with other Communist Parties and with anti-Western national liberation movements.<sup>17</sup> The Department guided the campaigns of the Party on international and colonial questions. It also helped foreign Communists and colonials resident in Britain and assisted the work of Party members who had managed to get into or create various organisations concerned with international questions within Britain.<sup>18</sup> Dutt, Vice-Chairman of the Party, was in charge of the Department in 1951 and chaired the 32-member International Affairs Committee which met on a monthly basis.<sup>19</sup> In practice Dutt's other commitments ensured that he could only devote 2 days per week to Departmental business.<sup>20</sup> Its business was nevertheless vast.

The work was in two sections – European and American, and the Colonial Department, the latter in effect encompassing the rest of the world. Maud Rogerson<sup>21</sup> worked as head of the Colonial Department and, like Dutt, had access to half-time secretarial assistance.<sup>22</sup> Bob Stewart supervised the European section of the work but had many other duties which divided his time. By 1952 Idris Cox was established as the only full-timer able to devote himself to the Department's work and even he complained of conflicting demands. What made the International Department effective was the voluntary unpaid labour that it was able to command, much of it effectively full-time. A report of April 1951 estimated that about 120 Party members worked directly for the Department.<sup>23</sup> Of these 75 belonged to its sub-committees, while others came in to keep press cuttings, file and duplicate papers, prepare various Newsletters, keep the library and engage in other organisational work. Of the 75 sub-committee members the report said that there were 'about 50 [who] give most of their time to the work done under the guidance of the Department'.

The sub-committees in 1951 – others could be added or subtracted as occasion demanded<sup>24</sup> – covered Africa,<sup>25</sup> the Far East, Malaya,<sup>26</sup> India, and the Middle East. There was also a European Co-ordinating Committee,<sup>27</sup> an Irish and a Jewish Committee. Special groupings of West Indians,<sup>28</sup> Africans, South Africans, Ceylonese and Indian students also convened, though the groups varied in size and levels of activity. About 30 Indian students, mostly in London, were active in campaigns concerned with the uprising in Telengana and the related government repression. The dozen or so South Africans concerned themselves exclusively with South African affairs. The more numerous Cypriots – about 130 – were organised in special branches, published

their own weekly paper *To Vema* and translated the *British Road to Socialism* within months of its publication. The International Department itself published separate newsletters on Africa, the West Indies, India and the Middle East. In addition, ever since the Emergency was declared in 1948, the Party issued a duplicated *Malayan Monitor* edited by H. B. Lim. The Ceylonese student group duplicated a monthly airmail letter sent by the Ceylon Communist Party which was then distributed free of charge to Ceylonese living in Britain. The Jewish Committee produced a printed paper the *Jewish Clarion* and the Connolly Association, under the guidance of the Irish sub-committee, was responsible for selling the *Irish Democrat* – a publication that sold 4,600 in March 1951, some 9,000 in 1952. The *Africa Newsletter*, by contrast (issued monthly since May 1947 and banned in Uganda, Kenya and the Gold Coast), sold only 677 copies – over half of them in Britain, with Nigeria, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone taking most of those sold in Africa. The other publications produced under the International Department's auspices can be seen in Table One below.

Where possible, sub-committees would develop organisational offshoots through which they could conduct their work, as exemplified by the Irish Committee's Connolly Association and the Malayan sub-committee's Lee Tian Tai Committee. The West Indies sub-committee worked through the Caribbean Labour Congress and published *Caribbean News* (circ. 3,000 in 1952). Other links were obviously *ad hoc* such as the Africa sub-committee's Seretse Khama Campaign and its Kenya Provisional Committee.

Table 1

	frequency	circulation
<i>West Indies Newsletter</i>	Monthly since Jan 1950	316
<i>India Newsletter</i>	Monthly since 1945	230
<i>Middle East Newsletter</i>	Monthly since 1948	75
<i>Ceylon Newsletter</i>	Monthly	150
<i>Malayan Monitor</i>	Monthly	580
<i>South African Bulletin</i>	Irregular	200
<i>Bulletin of Democratic Information on Egypt and the Sudan</i>	Monthly	120

Of course the Party press and its other publications were the main conduit for the publicity work of the International Department. Derek Kartun of the *Daily Worker* sat on the International Committee while

a member of each sub-committee was responsible for daily liaison with the Party. Relations with the *Daily Worker*, *World News and Views*, *Communist Review*, *Labour Monthly*, and *Challenge* were said to be good. This was related to the fact that the Party itself, under the leadership of its Executive, accepted responsibility for major international campaigns such as Malaya, friendship with China, the Martinsville Seven and others which prevailed in 1950-51. In 1952 Arthur Horner and Pollitt were the main speakers at a Holborn Hall meeting on India, while Gallacher headed the list at the same venue on Ireland, and Pollitt and Lim helped to revitalise the flagging Malayan campaign. Horner's inclusion in the campaign on India was intended to demonstrate concern at the plight of trade unions in Nehru's India. It was in fact a cause for dissatisfaction that there was a lack of close relations between the International and Industrial Departments.

The Party had set itself the task of combatting 'imperialism within the Labour Movement' and this evidently required, according to its annual report, more co-operation than it was getting from the Industrial Department in 1951. The latter, it was said, needed to give more attention to the 'fairly continuous campaigns' that were run from the International Department – such as the struggle against apartheid, the campaigns in solidarity with the Telengana peasant rising and the nationalist movement in the Gold Coast, the alleged attacks on trade unions in India, all of which – and many more besides – were salient in 1951-2. Indeed the annual report made clear that the International Department and its various sub-committees were severely overstretched in trying also to:

initiate and give practical leadership to more limited campaigns, approaching organisations likely to be specially interested, such as the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), National Council of Civil Liberties (NCCL), Haldane Society, and specific trade unions. These [more limited campaigns] include the shootings in British Guiana, the arrests in Egypt and Iraq, the arrests in the Sudan, Police attacks on Kenya Africans, etc. and events in this country such as the race riots in Liverpool, police brutality in Birmingham and Manchester, the colonial seamen and the innumerable examples of colour discrimination.<sup>29</sup>

The obvious problem here was that the Party took on more than it could cope with. The Department complained as early as 1951 that: 'The post-war stream of comrades whose interest in our work had been aroused by their own experience has ... almost completely ceased, and the number of new cadres we are finding is quite inadequate for the development we need.'<sup>30</sup> But the complaint reflected thwarted ambition rather than a sense of declining resources. At no time before the war had the Party been able to command more activists than it possessed in 1951. Meanwhile the list of 'limited campaigns' mentioned

above is notable for items that only commanded public attention in Britain many years later, such as 'police brutality', 'innumerable examples of colour discrimination' and 'race riots'. These were issues which the Party believed had to be brought into the trade unions and the Labour Party. At the same time the growth and spread of colonial nationalist movements clearly demanded an expansion of the Department's work if it was to keep abreast of developments, and this duly occurred in 1952-54.<sup>31</sup> The subjects discussed monthly by the International Affairs Committee in the mid-50s clearly demonstrate its preoccupation with colonial liberation and the problem of mobilising public opinion in Britain, not only in acts of solidarity with overseas struggles but in connection with the growing problem of racism in Britain. Keeping abreast of developments in the Cold War is the only other major concern on the Department's agenda.<sup>32</sup>

Evidence that the wider labour movement was paying more attention to colonial issues was provided by the annual conference of the Labour Party at Morecambe in 1952 which recorded 44 resolutions on colonial matters touching on issues such as the Seretse Khama affair, the Central African Federation, South Africa and Malaya. Of course the conference boiled these down to just two composite resolutions and a similar condensing process operated in the unions. The 1952 TUC recorded two resolutions on South Africa and one on colonial living standards but the individual unions with a sizeable Communist presence managed many more. Nearly 100 resolutions on international and colonial issues were received by just five unions in 1952 – the Welsh miners, AEU, ASSET, NAFTA, and AScW.<sup>33</sup> Someone was obviously making an effort to bring these matters to the attention of people who were supposed to be only interested in wages and working conditions. The Communists made no such assumption, but those of them who ran the Party's International Department knew that their work could easily be relegated to a 'specialist' ghetto activity. It so happened that industrial work was subject to the same pressures; individual militants and whole factory branches were inclined to go their own way and neglect their wider Party responsibilities. It is not at all clear that the Industrial Department was in control of all the industrial work of Party members, even narrowly defined industrial work, let alone able to insert a broad range of political issues into such work.

## COLONIAL WARS

The Emergency declared in Malaya in June 1948 inaugurated a war against the Communists (organised as the Malayan Peoples Liberation Army) during which the British employed tactics later made infamous in Vietnam by the USA, such as chemical defoliants, forcible evacuation of whole villages, and mass internment. The *Daily Worker* published photographs in 1950 showing the severed heads of insurgents who had been captured by Dyak head-hunters brought from

Borneo by the British to fight on the peninsula and strike fear into minds of the rebels. The Malayan campaign in Britain flagged somewhat in 1951 but was revitalised in 1952, thanks to the efforts of Lim and Pollitt and the publication of a new pamphlet on Malaya which made record sales of 20,000 copies. *Daily Worker* leaflets and special issues also continued to focus on the brutal methods of counter-insurgency. Protest resolutions on Malaya were carried at conferences of the ETU, FBU, Scottish Miners and Welsh miners, and Les Cannon forcefully intervened on the issue during the debate on the General Council's report at the 1952 TUC congress.

Africa was of far greater concern to the Communists than it had ever been before the war. The main reason was obvious enough, the national movement had made itself felt since the 1940s in a continent in which it had previously been virtually absent South of the Sahara. South Africa was the great exception, having long been the Communists sole sub-Saharan base, but even here the situation had moved on quickly with the adoption of apartheid by the Malan government in 1948. This was of especial concern to the CPGB because it soon became evident that in strategic terms South Africa was Britain's closest Commonwealth partner.<sup>34</sup> British Governments were not inclined to criticise a regime with such impeccable anti-Communist credentials, governmental stability and excellent naval facilities. The Party made war against apartheid-South Africa from the beginning, working in such organisations as the NCCL and UDC, as well as the TUC, the trades councils and the Labour Party. A Provisional Committee was established by South African Communists in Britain for this purpose some time in 1952-3, liaising with the Party through Solly Sachs. Communist agitation against apartheid continued throughout the period we are dealing with and continued until the end, waxing and waning according to forces largely outside the Party's control.

The Seretse Khama affair was less protracted but just about as vivid a demonstration of racist logic as it was possible to get. It originated in 1950 during the Labour Government when the prospective chief of the Bamangwato people in Bechuanaland married Ruth Williams, to the obvious displeasure of the South African government. The Commonwealth Relations Office in London obligingly urged Seretse to renounce his claim to the chieftainship and commanded him to leave Bechuanaland altogether. Further instalments of this row served only to emphasise its racist and authoritarian components, culminating in the Tory decision to impose life banishment on Seretse Khama. The Communists joined forces with Fenner Brockway in publicising the connections between the cruelties of this particular case and the system of colonialism in general and the apartheid system in South Africa in particular.

The plan to impose a Central African Federation – involving North and South Rhodesia and Nyasaland – also originated under Labour,

having been first suggested at the Victoria Falls conference in 1949. It was another instance of the complete disregard which the colonial administrators had for black African opinion, which was overwhelmingly hostile to the scheme. The virtually self-governing white minority in Southern Rhodesia – the most enthusiastic lobby for the Federation – imagined itself as its obvious rulers and beneficiaries. When the scheme was implemented in 1953 it fell short of these expectations of Dominion status, but it was not until the end of 1962 that the Federation was finally killed off at a time when the reality of black nationalism in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland could no longer be denied. Again, the CPGB and Brockway's Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism<sup>35</sup> led the agitation in Britain which focused on the scheme's undemocratic and racist characteristics.

Long before the Kenyan Emergency began in October 1952 the Party had shown real interest in land reform in the country. Its first publications on the issue appeared in the 1920s, but as recently as early 1952 representatives of the International Department met with delegates of the Kenya African Union when they came to London to put the case for land reform once again and voice their opposition to the proposed new constitution. Through the medium of the UDC the case was published as a pamphlet called *Land Hunger in Kenya*. As soon as the Emergency was declared the Communists sold 115,000 leaflets explaining the background to the crisis, while a series of WFTU articles were reprinted as a pamphlet called *Terror in Kenya*. A special Saturday issue of the *Daily Worker* on Kenya made record sales. The International Department also arranged for D. N. Pritt to defend Jomo Kenyatta at his Kapenguria trial and act as President of a Kenya Provisional Committee. The Party's propaganda judged that 'the British Tory Government has surpassed even its barbarous methods in Malaya', including the use of collective punishments, confiscation of cattle and food, detention without trial, shooting on sight and concentration camps. It situated the violence in the context we are now familiar with:

This new phase of mass suppression is an expression of the growing crisis of British imperialism. It reveals the desperation of the Tories to compensate for United States' domination by increased exploitation and suppression of the colonial peoples, while at the same time extending their war bases in the colonial countries.<sup>36</sup>

It also contextualised the escalation of violence in relation to legislation introduced before the Emergency was declared, legislation that it said was designed to suppress the trade unions and further curtail the freedom of the African press and the right to assembly in Kenya. The Party also saw the coercion as a warning of what the opposition to the proposed Central African Federation might expect.

While the mainstream press demonised the Mau Mau movement, the *Daily Worker* demanded expressions of solidarity from the trade unions and Labour Party. A Kenya Committee was formed in early 1953 to co-ordinate this appeal. It was chaired by Frida Laski and composed of Labour MPs such as Leslie Plummer, Arthur Lewis, Sidney Silverman, J. P. Mallalieu, and S. O. Davies, together with Communists (like Doris Lessing) and those close to them such as John Platts-Mills and activists in Fenner Brockway's British Centre of the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism (forerunner of the Movement for Colonial Freedom, which was launched in 1954). Within two years of the start of the Emergency 7,000 Africans had already died – 6,000 of them at the hands of the police and British troops. The Kenya Committee reported that there had been 469 executions by June 1954 and 400 deaths in prisons and concentration camps. By that summer 24 Europeans had been killed since the Emergency began.

### **MOVEMENT FOR COLONIAL FREEDOM**

Communist collaboration with Brockway was not as trouble-free as might be supposed, given how often they had found themselves on the same side in unpopular causes. Party documents refer to 'fruitless efforts to reach agreement with Brockway' prior to the launch of the broadly based Kenya Committee – a structure which the Communists evidently preferred.<sup>37</sup> The Political Committee was informed in June 1953 that:

Every possible step has, and is, being taken to secure the co-operation of Brockway and the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism on all phases of activity on African affairs, even to the point of making big concessions. But experience has shown that Brockway refuses to co-operate with any committee or movement which includes Communists and which is not under his complete control. Unless he is able to do this then steps are taken to try and split and disrupt the movement – as in the case in relation to the Seretse Khama Committee and the Kenya Provisional Committee.<sup>38</sup>

The committees in question were of great value to the Communists because they enabled them to provide speakers who put the case to trades councils, trade unions, Labour Parties, and Co-ops. What was wanted by 1953, they believed, was an African Affairs Committee which would provide a permanent platform from which to stimulate interest and activity related to the colonial question within the labour movement. 'Unless this is done', warned the International Department, 'a free field is left to Brockway, Racial Unity, and all kinds of dubious organisations to confuse the real issues'.<sup>39</sup> There was another face to the problem:

Numerous delegations come to Britain from all parts of Africa. Politically, they incline to the Communist Party. But as a matter of expediency (and because it gives a medium of approach to MPs and the Colonial Office) they go to Brockway and the Congress of Peoples Against Imperialism. Some of the more conscious elements also seek secret personal contact with the Party, and explain (rather shamefacedly) why they go to Brockway, but many of them make no contact with the Party.<sup>40</sup>

This underlined the significance of the loss of Communist representation in Parliament since 1950, and the importance of regaining it. It also shows the felt need for allies and the value to the Party of the open form of political activity because:

The existence of a broad, united Committee on African Affairs, would enable us to make far closer contact with these delegations. What is equally important is that hundreds of Africans in Britain are in broad sympathy with Communism, but because of security reasons and the close watch of M.I.5 and the Colonial Office, they hesitate to make direct contact and to become members. A broad Committee of this character would provide a medium for them.<sup>41</sup>

Brockway's wariness of the Communists probably stemmed from a conviction that too close an association would only hamper the cause and provide opportunities for wrecking it altogether. In 1927 he had briefly occupied the chairmanship of the League Against Imperialism. This incurred the wrath of the Labour Party which denounced the League as a Communist front – a charge vindicated when the Communists entered an ultra-left phase the following year and drove nearly all non-Communists out of the organisation. The past sins of the Communists continued to cost them. When the Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) was established the CP was excluded as a founding organisation and attempts at affiliation by Party branches were frustrated on the grounds that organisations proscribed by the Labour Party were ineligible.<sup>42</sup> This did not prevent individual Communists from joining at the outset. Barbara Haq, Kay Beauchamp, Idris Cox, Billy Strachan and Jack Woddis – all members of the Party's International Affairs Committee – were among those who did. When the inaugural conference of the MCF took place at the Waldorf Hotel on 11 April 1954 delegates representing 22 trade unions, 38 constituency Labour Parties, and 21 other organisations were present but Communist organisations were absent from the list.

However, the Party leadership's determination to use this opportunity, once the MCF had been established, can be gleaned from the fact that the Political Committee, following Dutt's lead, complained in November 1956 of the 'neglect of the splendid opportunities opened

out for positive work within the Movement for Colonial Freedom and its importance in relation to the united front'.<sup>43</sup> The Movement was more or less what the International Department had been looking for – an open, broadly-based vehicle for Communist interventions on colonial issues. It was committed to promoting the right of self-determination for the colonies and insisted, like the Communists, that independence was a precondition for economic advance and future transnational co-operation with Britain. The analysis of colonial exploitation and repression found within the pages of its journal *Prod* (and its successors *Colonial Freedom News* and *Liberation*) was often indistinguishable from the Communists' in its stress on the malign influence of capitalism and colonialism. The great advantage of the Movement, however, was that it had the legitimising support of dozens of Labour MPs and groups such as Christian Action. The ETU, AEU, USDAW, NUM and NUR were all affiliated to the Movement, as were all the British-based colonial organisations. Yet it often took the same line on an issue as the CP – as in its opposition to the proposed Federation of Malaysia and the Central African Federation; its campaign against apartheid in South Africa; its opposition to the wars in Vietnam and Malaya;<sup>44</sup> its concern to oppose racism in Britain and promote appropriate legislation against race discrimination.<sup>45</sup> Communists soon reached responsible positions within the Movement. Its Trade Union Committee, for example was organised by Barbara Haq (together with Bob Edwards, the General Secretary of the Chemical Workers' Union). In the later 1950s more Communists rose to prominent positions within the organisation and its London Area Council in particular became something of a Communist stronghold. The Party presence became conspicuous only in the 1960s, however, when membership overall had entered a steep decline in the wake of decolonisation and the rise of rival campaigns such as Vietnamese Solidarity which better caught the imagination of a new generation of activists.<sup>46</sup>

### AFTER DECOLONISATION

The Leninist elements of the Party's analysis of colonialism persisted throughout the 1960s. Required reading for the International Affairs Committee in April 1961, for example, was Walter Markov's report on neo-colonialism, originally delivered to an SED conference in Leipzig.<sup>47</sup> This repeated the phrases of the theory of 'the general crisis of capitalism' and echoed the conclusions of the meeting of 81 Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow from the previous autumn. The International Department's report of March 1960 observed that its 'main attention is on the struggles in the colonies and the newly-independent nations and the effort to integrate the issues arising with the struggle taking place in Britain'.<sup>48</sup> In fulfilling this aim it set out a prospectus remarkably similar to that of 1951, though it is

notable that activity within the MCF, the Boycott Committee (regarding South Africa) and 'stimulating activity in Britain against racial discrimination' were specifically mentioned additions. In its plans for future activity the development of 'a broad movement against apartheid' and bolstering the MCF were priorities, and educational work still included study of the 'imperialist basis of the British economy'. The problems encountered by the Department seemed familiar too – its work was still regarded as a specialist field, outside London there was little activity, the Party was still being frozen out from political recognition in the various broad campaigns it was involved with, cadres were not coming forward, but rather were being taken away for other forms of work. But in reality big changes were afoot.

Whereas the political independence of former colonies had been declared fraudulent in the late 1940s and early 1950s, on the grounds of their continued military and economic subordination to the West, Communists had become accustomed to the idea that the existence of the Soviet bloc forced 'the imperialists' to accept peaceful coexistence with the new states and thus permit a measure of real independence. Secure political sovereignty ultimately depended on movement towards a planned economy, according to Soviet propaganda, but ever since the Bandung Conference, the Russians had been grateful for the 'non-aligned' foreign policies of countries such as India and had altogether dropped their earlier dismissal of these independent states as mere fig leaves for imperialist 'business as usual'. The stress was henceforward on the 'natural' alliance of the socialist and former colonial worlds. This purely tactical development in Russian foreign policy was accompanied by cautionary 'theory' warning of the new indirect methods of neo-colonialism which could still be employed as the former empires inevitably conceded political independence to their remaining overseas possessions.

By 1963 colonies, semi-colonies, dependent territories and Dominions – which in Lenin's day had totalled 77 per cent of the world's earth surface and contained 69 per cent of its population – represented just 7.7 per cent of its territory and 1.7 per cent of its population.<sup>49</sup> But the collapse of capitalism and the undermining of reformism within the western working class which were supposed to follow from the end of empire did not happen. The theory of neo-colonialism went some way to explain why. New tactics had apparently been adopted by imperialism precisely because 'direct political domination is weakened or no longer possible'. Aid was tied to the needs of the metropolis; military bases were retained in formally independent countries; a system of unequal exchange prevailed; stooge governments did the bidding of their metropolitan masters; western cultural dominance prevented a socialist answer to current post-independence problems. There was clearly some truth in these arguments. But as more and more former colonies became independent, Communist

propaganda stressed that only industrialisation on the Soviet model could bring a final victory.<sup>50</sup> The Movement for Colonial Freedom did not necessarily see this truth. That is one of the reasons why Dutt argued in the Political Committee in 1963 that while: 'The importance of the activities of organisations like the MCF and the anti-apartheid movement cannot be over-emphasised ... one should not overlook the serious petty bourgeois liberal limitations of these organisations'.<sup>51</sup> Brockway, for his part, remained concerned about Communist influence in the MCF until 1967, the year of his retirement as chair – by which time leading Communists were prominent in the Movement and promoting the Party's colonial line from within its governing council.<sup>52</sup>

The old Leninist theory of imperialism was never entirely displaced by theories of neo-imperialism. They coexisted and were taken seriously enough to obfuscate new issues, such as Britain's intended membership of the Common Market, which we will look at in the next chapter. When an Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement was signed in 1965 the Party's International Affairs Committee explained it as 'a gain for imperialism corresponding to the steadily increasing penetration of British monopoly capitalism into the twenty-six counties' and consonant 'with the Common Market strategy of bringing Ireland into the EEC as a sphere of influence of Britain' – this being a device 'for securing an extra vote, and protecting the British rear against continental penetration'. This sort of reasoning, which presupposed something like an imperialist 'control and command centre' forever plotting new strategies with cybernetic efficiency, was exposed as hopelessly misguided as a way of understanding the unfolding crisis in Northern Ireland. On this issue the Communists were in any case completely marginalised where it counted – in Northern Ireland – though 'the return of comrades' to the six counties was said to have been a factor in developments which the Party welcomed in the years 1965–8.<sup>53</sup>

Republicans followed the Communists in denouncing the 'economic act of Union' in January 1966 and later that year Loyalists from Ian Paisley to Terence O'Neill competed with one another in their attempts to whip up sectarian strife – this being the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising. The Communists were officially represented at the *Irish Democrat* conference in London in February 1967 to demand civil rights in the six counties, and when the Republican Clubs were declared illegal in the province in March the Communist Party of Northern Ireland made common cause with them. Similarly in May Communists, Republicans and members of the Irish Workers' Party initiated an anti-EEC campaign and worked together in opposition to apartheid and the war in Vietnam. The growth in political conflict in Northern Ireland was unmistakable but when Westminster got round to discussing the province in August 1967 more time was spent on a point of order than the debate itself. The Communists saw progress at grassroots level in October, however,

when the Irish Labour Party restored the socialist plank to its programme which had been dropped in 1932, and when Sinn Fein adopted a socialist aim for the first time in its history in November. Similarly the Party saw another hopeful sign in the merger of the Workers' Union of Ireland and the Irish Transport and General Workers Union – which healed the breach in Irish trade unionism that had divided the movement since 1923. The Party participated in the London conference of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster in January 1968. Its perspective was 'to improve the civil rights position in the six counties', where it perceived a deteriorating situation symbolised by the passage of a sectarian education bill through Stormont early in 1968. It believed that 'the mood of the Irish people had undergone a transformation' affecting the labour movement, the traditional petty-bourgeois parties, farmers, students and intellectuals – even the clergy. 'Everywhere there is ferment and stirring ... Hardly a night passes in Dublin without some well-attended meeting, on national or international issues' and two aspects of this were most notable – the swing to the Left and the trend to unity of 'the entire opposition' in the six counties.<sup>54</sup> Big changes were coming but as yet no one foresaw armed conflict.

### THE PEACE MOVEMENT

Around the time that the Communist presence within the MCF leadership became conspicuous, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) was subject to the same attentions. Like the MCF, CND had also entered a phase of decline when the Communists began to rise to positions of prominence. But the Communists had been ardent campaigners for peace since the Soviet-inspired Stockholm Peace Congress of March 1950. This had been brought into existence in response to the development of the H-bomb by the USA, a fearful weapon of genocide in the eyes of many contemporaries, which the USSR did not yet possess. The Stockholm Appeal called for the absolute prohibition of all weapons of mass destruction and the adoption of strict international controls of enforcement. A British Peace Committee was formed to collect signatures to support this appeal for the banning of all nuclear weapons. Its sponsors included the Dean of Canterbury, Sybil Thorndike, Hugh MacDiarmid, Rutland Boughton, Sean O'Casey, Professor V. Gordon Childe, J. B. S. Haldane and Labour MPs such as John Platts-Mills and Leslie Solley. The public response showed that the initiative had real resonance and local groups were formed to collect signatures, organise marches and bring the problem to the attention of local Labour parties, trades councils and trade unions. The British Peace Committee – on which the Communists were strongly represented – was promptly added to Labour's list of proscribed organisations and the TUC anathematised it as a Communist front. One million signatures were collected by

September 1950 despite these obstacles – but a resolution calling for the banning of nuclear weapons was defeated at that month's TUC congress by 5.6 to 1.9 million votes. The Labour Government then took action to prevent the second World Peace Congress meeting in Sheffield in November by refusing entry to many hundreds of its foreign delegates. Pablo Picasso was one of the minority of foreigners who managed to get to Sheffield. He was met in the evening drizzle by an escorting party composed of local Communist shop stewards from the engineering industry led by Chris Law. The group marched down to Thorpe's café in Fargate, the Communists no doubt enjoying the symbolism of such a gathering; but the congress itself had to be transferred to Warsaw where the demand for international enforcement and supervision of a complete ban on atomic weapons was reiterated.

The Korean War threatened to become a third world war as the congress deliberated. Chinese troops had driven the Americans back across the Yalu river. The Communists automatically sided with the North from the outset and the *Daily Worker* was the only British newspaper which had a correspondent, Alan Winnington, with the North Korean army. In mid-September 1950 Winnington sent a long radio despatch to the *Daily Worker* on his return to Peking which told of his five weeks witnessing the war from close quarters. He compared the Americans to the Nazis, described the saturation bombing of North Korean towns, the indiscriminate killing of civilians and the massacres of political prisoners:

Try to imagine Rangwul valley, about five miles south-east of Taejon on the Yongdong road. Hills rise sharply from a level floor about 100 yards across and a quarter of a mile long. In the middle you can walk safely, though your shoes may roll on American cartridge cases, but at the sides you must be careful for the rest of the valley is a thin crust of earth covering corpses of more than 7,000 men and women. One of the party with me stepped through nearly to his hip in rotting human tissue. Every few feet there is a fissure in the topsoil through which you can see into a gradually sinking mass of flesh and bone. The smell is something tangible that seeps into your throat. For days after I could taste the smell. All along the great death pits, waxy dead hands and feet, knees, elbows, twisted faces and heads burst open by bullets, stick through the soil. When I read of Nazi murder camps at Belsen and Buchenwald I tried to imagine what they were like. Now I know I failed.<sup>55</sup>

According to Winnington 'every town, every village [had] its murdered democrats to mourn' for this was 'only one of the massacres carried out at American instructions' and the 'lowest estimate puts the number of dead political prisoners at 200,000 since June 25'. Winnington quoted captured American soldiers, invariably as ignorant of the war's purposes as they were contrite about their part in it. He depicted

North Korea as a land of democracy, freedom and prosperity, contrasting it with the rotting puppet state south of the 38th Parallel. It was obvious who started the war and that it would lead to world war three unless Britain – ‘once more ... the key to world peace’ – was detached from the war camp. Winnington paid for these reports personally by being refused permission to return to Britain. At home ‘the war placed the Party in political difficulties’, as one full-timer recalled, ‘and we talked about the possibility of going underground’, such was the tension and hostility.<sup>56</sup>

When President Truman publicly referred to the possibility of using atomic weapons in Korea, Attlee rushed to Washington in December 1950 to counsel against such a course. But the danger of nuclear war remained a source of real fear throughout the 1950s and into the following decade, and foreign policy issues bitterly divided the Labour party and trade unions, on questions such as German rearmament, the European Defence Community, the atomic arms race and the war in Vietnam. This was the raw material which the British Peace Committee (BPC) had to work with. From the beginning of 1950 it produced a monthly discussion journal, *To Live in Peace*, and in January 1951 it was able to publish *The Peace Volunteer* which sought to co-ordinate the local peace groups throughout the country. Its first issue publicised public rallies and conferences in London and most of the provincial cities for January and February 1951. At this stage the principal campaigning issue was German rearmament rather than atomic weapons. The spectre was raised of a militarised Germany under the command of former Nazis. But the BPC also argued that ‘the mounting burden of armaments is having disastrous effects on Britain’s industrial and social structure’ and that ‘as a result we are rapidly heading for economic crisis and the devastation of a third world war’.<sup>57</sup> Such parochial considerations always had their place in its propaganda but when the Congress of the Peoples for Peace convened in Vienna in December 1952, the World Peace Committee – whose leaders included Bernal, Pietro Nenni and Professor Joliet-Curie – was able to claim that the Stockholm Appeal had produced 600 million signatures worldwide. The BPC focused on international concerns such as the threat to peace represented by German rearmament, fear of atomic weapons, the use of chemical and bacteriological weapons in Korea and China, and the threat of a third world war.

Around 2,000 delegates attended the Vienna Congress. Soviet propaganda stressed that they came from all countries and represented all manner of social backgrounds and many different religious and political convictions. *Pravda* editorials argued that the question of peace transcended such divisions.<sup>58</sup> Stalin insisted that peaceful co-existence of the capitalist and socialist systems was possible. But the onus was on the peoples of the capitalist countries to bring the cold war to an end since it was their countries which generated international

tensions. The Russians, it was insisted, would play their part by attending any serious international forum concerned to secure peace. Stalin announced his readiness to meet President Eisenhower as part of this process. The Vienna Congress thus took on a topical character when it demanded an end to hostilities in Korea, a Five-Power peace pact, and an immediate end to the wars in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Malaya. The outlook of prolonged conflict and dangerous instability in international politics seemed endemic to many people, however. Within two weeks of an armistice in Korea at the end of July 1953 the Russians announced that they too now possessed the H-bomb. The threat of re-ignition of the Korean conflict lingered on into 1954. BPC lobbies, demonstrations and meetings continued to emphasise the danger. Some hope was invested in the meeting of the foreign ministers of the four Great Powers in Berlin in January but 'the main obstacle' was declared to be the continuing intention of the governments of the USA and Britain to bring Germany into a military alliance of some sort. Peace propaganda in Britain throughout 1953 showed how the Western powers had reneged on agreements reached at the Potsdam Conference to occupy Germany for the purposes of its disarmament, demilitarisation, and denazification. Soviet entreaties for Four-Power talks were shown to be repeatedly rebuffed by the USA in the course of 1952, as were its proposals to constitute an all-German government. The Western Powers were depicted as intent on building up a Western Defence organisation resting on West Germany.<sup>59</sup>

Many non-Communists continued to believe that this was a mistake. An editorial in *Reynolds News* (7 January 1954) empathised with the Russians. So did a number of Labour MPs and the Campaign Against German Rearmament could count on the support of prominent left-wingers such as Bevan, Mikardo, Foot, Brockway, and Harold Wilson. A Gallup poll in the spring of 1954 showed that most Labour Party members opposed German rearmament.<sup>60</sup> Edward Thompson, 'primarily responsible' in his political work 'for work in the peace movement' recalled 'a very good movement in West Yorkshire ... a genuine alliance of Labour Party people ... often ... expelled from the Labour Party, traditional left pacifists, and Communists and trade unionists'.<sup>61</sup> A National Emergency Conference on Germany, held in London in April, was addressed by leaders of the Scottish miners, the Fire Brigades' Union and the Foundry Workers, as the trade unions became animated by the issue. German rearmament was an even bigger issue in France, of course, and together with the war in Indo-China was thought capable of destabilising French democracy and inaugurating 'a long period of revolutionary action'.<sup>62</sup> The world was awaiting French ratification of the treaty setting up the European Defence Community and its various military protocols which had been signed on 27 May 1952 by the six countries that later formed the Common Market. In the event the

French Assembly refused to do so on 30 August 1954. In October, however, London and Paris agreed on West Germany's entry into NATO. The cause of peace thus remained an urgent issue.

The Communist Party's occupation of the moral high ground seemed to get even more entrenched when the H-bomb test on Bikini atoll in March 1954 highlighted an even bigger danger and inaugurated the real beginning of the campaigns to 'Ban the Bomb'. Scientific evidence soon emerged from this test which exposed the apocalyptic scale of the threat to the planet which the new weapon now represented. There was no theoretical limit to size of the bombs that could now be constructed. Indeed it was clear to some scientists that the nuclear stockpile was already so large that further additions were superfluous in terms of their killing potential. Some questioned the credibility of the threat of war under these circumstances, others emphasised the unbearable degree of tension and danger which such weapons entailed. A feeling developed that Britain had a special role to play in extracting the USA and the Soviet Union from the impasse in which they were both trapped.<sup>63</sup> By the middle of 1954 the H-bomb had become the first of four campaigning priorities in British Peace Committee propaganda – the others were German rearmament, peace in Asia, and world trade. An end to all nuclear tests was now seen as a first step 'towards securing their effective total abolition'. In 1955 Britain acquired its own H-bomb and the BPC backed two great national lobbies of Parliament to get urgent summit talks on the political agenda. A great deal of alarm was generated by talk of NATO using 'battlefield' nuclear weapons (A-bombs) to stop the Red Army. In this way defence experts on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrated an irresponsible ignorance and stupidity which provided the Party with propaganda opportunities, such as the claim that the 'West prepares for nuclear war'.<sup>64</sup> When it was announced that an East-West Summit Conference was scheduled to take place in Geneva in July, the British Peace Committee hailed the news as a massive breakthrough, in this hitherto unfavourable context.

The failure of the 'spirit of Geneva' by November, however, was firmly laid at the door of the Americans, by Labour left-wingers as well as the Communists.<sup>65</sup> The BPC nevertheless began 1956 by declaring that it would make it the 'Year of Disarmament'. Disarmament was 'the key world issue' according to its publicity. Britain could be made to cut its own defence budget, reduce national service to 12 months and ban the testing, manufacture and use of nuclear weapons. The way in which Britain would be converted to these policies, however, remained the same as before – by means of petitions, resolutions, letters, poster parades and the lobbying of Parliament. It was all curiously inept and pacifistic, though Communist realism – in the form of an unswerving pro-Sovietism – was always present in the background, when not more prominent. Events soon brought it to the fore. On the first day of

September 1956 the Executive of the BPC warned that 'the danger of war against Egypt is serious ... Powerful voices in our country and France are demanding military action to solve the [Canal] dispute and to overthrow the Egyptian Government'.<sup>66</sup> It then proceeded to insist on peaceful negotiations conducted within the terms of the UN Charter. When, in October, armed intervention to overthrow the Egyptian government and Soviet military intervention in Hungary coincided, the BPC called for a cessation of the fighting in both countries and reaffirmed its belief in 'non-interference'.<sup>67</sup>

This concealed major differences of opinion within the peace movement, as the World Council of Peace acknowledged when it met in Helsinki on 18 November. Indeed opposing points of view had made it 'impossible to formulate an agreed evaluation of the events' in Hungary. Nevertheless the Communist preponderance in the World Council may be gauged from the fact that it was unanimous in noting that: 'on the one hand the Cold War with its years of hate and distrust and the policy of blocs, and on the other hand the faults of the former Hungarian administration as well as exploitation of these faults by foreign propagandists, have been at the root of the events in Hungary'. In this way the popular basis of the Hungarian uprising was conjured out of existence, as was the nature of Soviet domination in eastern Europe. By January 1957 the chairman of the BPC, Gordon Schaffer,<sup>68</sup> was purporting to derive optimism from the events of October because a 'broad front of peace' had come into existence around the Suez crisis, while the Hungarian drama had shown that the 'real problem was the division of Europe into armed camps'. The BPC and WPC, in Schaffer's view, had 'gained in prestige because they frankly expressed the anxieties of peace lovers and the differences of opinion over events in Hungary'.<sup>69</sup>

The peace agitations of the Communists were not in the least hampered by the Soviet Union's readiness to use force when it suited its purposes. The main aim of the agitation was to destroy the NATO alliance, but there was a real public fear of another world war to play on – Communists themselves undoubtedly felt it. Britain exploded its first thermonuclear bomb on 15 May and Bevan was probably speaking for most of the activist left when he demanded destruction of the nuclear arsenal before it destroyed humanity.<sup>70</sup> Though he brought disillusion to many Labour left-wingers in the autumn by successfully opposing a unilateralist motion at the party's annual conference, Bevan could argue that he had always been an advocate of the Communist argument that security would come from agreements between the nuclear powers and that this was the way to get a test ban, international controls and eventual disarmament. The Communist-influenced unions such as the ETU also opposed the unilateralist (Norwood) resolution – moved by a Trotskyist – and an insistence on multilateral talks remained Party policy when the Campaign for Nuclear

Disarmament (CND) was launched on 17 February 1958 by Bertrand Russell and Canon Collins at Westminster Hall. Yet in August 1957 the Party observed that the scores of constituency labour parties which had sent resolutions forward to the annual conference demanding nuclear disarmament were remarkable not just for their number but for the fact that they called for a campaign to bring the desired changes to pass.

'If all these local labour organisations ... were to launch local public campaigns themselves', observed the Party's propaganda department, 'they could have a powerful impact on the policy of the Government and the Labour Executive and start the process ... that is so urgently needed'.<sup>71</sup> It was clear to most observers that the launch of CND was just that response – one that had gathered momentum since J. B. Priestley's *New Statesman* article on 'Britain and Nuclear Bombs' in February 1957; the campaigning momentum was still gathering when the world first learned of the new organisation's existence.<sup>72</sup> Evidently Priestley was not alone in thinking that the disarmament stalemate at 'summit' level could be broken if Britain acted unilaterally. This prospect had no chance of success, however, unless the Labour Party could be converted to it. On 26 February 1958 the *Daily Herald* produced a front-page editorial demanding that Britain should take the initiative in ending the manufacture as well as the testing of nuclear bombs. In March Frank Cousins, the leader of the TGWU, made clear his own opposition to the manufacture of the H-bomb. At Easter a demonstration of around 4,000 rallied in Trafalgar Square at the end of the first CND march from Aldermaston. In June the conference of the moderate GMWU voted in favour of unilateralism. Communists (especially YCLers) undoubtedly participated as individuals in the following year's demonstration. But it was not until 1960 that the Party leadership changed its mind and formally supported the Easter march. By this time the campaign had taken on the appearance of an unstoppable force. In the summer of 1959 the TGWU conference adopted an implicitly unilateralist resolution. Around 100,000 people attended the Trafalgar Square rally at the end of the 1960 Aldermaston March and – pinnacle of achievement – a unilateralist resolution was carried by 3.3 to 2.9 million votes at Labour's Scarborough conference.

CND was a spontaneous development beyond the control of the parties. It excited British socialists because it drew so many people into political activity. Suddenly Britain and its youth had burst 'out of apathy'. By contrast the British Peace Committee could seem a top-down, relatively lifeless thing. But it remained in existence and even entered into formal liaison with CND.<sup>73</sup> It was able to do so because CND changed in a direction agreeable to the Communists, just at the time the Communists were ready to embrace unilateralism.<sup>74</sup> In 1960 CND demanded British withdrawal from NATO. Peace activists and New Leftists had begun to identify the USA – supplier of the British

'independent' nuclear deterrent after the failure of the Blue Streak missile in 1960 – as an aggressive super-power. Britain's only hope of finding a truly independent foreign policy of the sort which they wanted – variously called positive neutralism or non-alignment – depended on cutting this umbilical cord. This accorded precisely with Communist objectives. The problem, however, was that CND had entered a decline by the time the Communists were ready to take it over. Although the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962 was in many ways a realisation of all that the unilateralists had feared – with the world brought close to the edge of a nuclear war – the Partial Test Ban Treaty of 1963 seems to have constituted enough progress to satisfy many people that their campaigning efforts on behalf of peace had succeeded. Membership of CND began to fall. Meanwhile CND's interests – or rather those of its leadership – expanded.

Since 1960 the old anti-imperialist discourse, which had long been hidden from view in the agitations of the peace movement, had begun to reconnect with anti-war propaganda. Colin Sweet, who was honorary secretary of the BPC, traced this back to the formulations of the Soviet writer Sobelev.<sup>75</sup> But Russian perceptions had long been coloured by the emergence of the 'non-aligned' movement. The Cuban revolution, the Algerian war, the violence in South Africa to enforce apartheid and the increased intervention of the USA in Vietnam, Central and Latin America, and South East Asia were among the factors which heightened awareness of the 'Third World', neo-imperialism and the possibilities of alternatives to capitalism. The New Left was particularly drawn to this cluster of issues but Communists now also stressed that 'it is not enough to cry "Ban the Bomb" and to work for disarmament ... essential though that is. The other pillar of the arch of peace is an unremitting campaign for the ending of colonialism and for genuine national independence, both political and economic, for all countries'.<sup>76</sup> War was increasingly seen as a feature of imperialism, and US imperialism in particular. This was 'the major lesson' of the WPC of 10 July 1965 in Helsinki where Jean-Paul Sartre moved the resolution demanding 'an immediate end to US aggression in South Vietnam and the withdrawal of US troops, the removal of military bases from South Vietnam and the immediate end of bombing and other aggressive acts'. Even this was not enough for much of the New Left which wanted nothing less than 'Victory to the NLF' – the West's enemy in Vietnam. Peggy Duff and Malcolm Caldwell of CND were merely observers at Helsinki but there is no doubt that they belonged to the wing of CND which identified US imperialism as the principal threat of war in the world. The leadership of CND was well to the left of the rank and file and had turned the original single-issue, vaguely pacifistic campaign into a competitor of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign and the milder British Campaign for Peace in Vietnam (which the Communists also supported). Gone were most of the old 'Ban the

'Bomb' campaigners – the peace activists; in their place were the politicos, in shades of deepest red.<sup>77</sup> Many of the leading positions within CND were taken up by Communists in the mid-60s, but membership and sales of its paper, *Sanity*, kept falling.

By the mid-60s it could no longer be denied that the BPC and WPC were also ailing organisations. They were denied the vigorous leadership of Bernal, who was seriously ill, and the Presidential Committee itself was 'too old' and 'too out of touch with current developments in the localities', in the view of one insider.<sup>78</sup> It had ceased to be properly representative by either age or geography and was 'narrower politically than it used to be'. The secretariat was 'weak' and lacked 'tact and authority' and required 'constant surveillance and guidance', though these were now beyond the capacity of the ailing Professor. The Soviet contribution had 'lapsed into formalism', the French tended to dominate proceedings, while the Chinese, supported by the Japanese and Albanians, 'but almost no-one else', used every opportunity to 'deliberately ... provoke and undermine' and discredit 'the Soviet position and ... the whole approach traditional to the movement'. Furthermore, in the view of the writer, Ivor Montagu:

the centralized type of mass activity, with as basic unit the Congress no longer works, because it does not correspond to the state of the world. We cannot return to the old days of the late 1940s and early 1950s when a unanimous course of action could be decided upon and evoke a world campaign (Stockholm Appeal, Five-Power Negotiation, etc).

Given the Chinese tactics, moreover, 'a big gathering is simply, at best, a big audience and opportunity for ... unanswered slander or, at worst, for a successful provocation'. But this was not the main problem. The main problem was that the 'movement' itself was no longer susceptible to the old techniques of control.

In fact virtually everything had changed since 1951. The peace activists were no longer primarily concerned with peace and they no longer followed the Communists to any great extent. When the BPC General Council met in May 1966 it agreed that the campaigning priority was Vietnam and that the campaign slogans adopted should demand an end to escalation of the conflict, an end to bombing of the North, an end to the war, and the evacuation of all foreign troops. It also wanted to campaign for majority rule in Rhodesia, and the withdrawal of Britain from NATO and, finally – when all these priorities had been listed – a complete ban on nuclear tests. Colin Sweet observed in 1966 that Britain had until the end of 1968 to decide if it wanted to stay in NATO, when the original twenty-year term came to an end. It followed that a massive effort should be made to bring Britain out. The Easter March from Aldermaston in 1966 accordingly began with the distribution of a petition to this effect and the Party's own propaganda

machine made sure that the future of NATO received prominent attention. NATO was denounced as an aggressive anti-Soviet alliance whose members had been continuously at war in one place or another – Malaya, Kenya, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, British Guyana, Greece, Vietnam – ever since its formation. Pulling out of it had to be accompanied by removal of the US military bases in Britain and negotiations for a pan-European peace treaty involving the USSR. The French had demanded the withdrawal of US forces on 7 March 1966 and had succeeded in leaving NATO's military wing. A new 'revisionist' Cold War history was gaining acceptance too and in this NATO's original and ongoing rationale – the Soviet threat – was made to look increasingly imaginary. The 'purely defensive' self-image of NATO was daily belied by the record of its members, especially that of the USA, now engaged in pulverising Vietnam. Vietnam was America's most important gift to Communist propaganda, but there were many others now coming to light, some still at the planning stage. By May 1966 the Party could credibly warn of the threat that the war would spill into Laos and Cambodia and even escalate to nuclear war. The supine Labour Government made it even easier for the Communists to adopt the moral high ground. While Senators Morse, Gruening, and Fulbright had already joined those who wanted an American withdrawal, the leaders of British Labour were singled out for special praise by the Johnson administration for their loyal support. But despite these opportunities for attack even leaders of the BPC such as Sweet felt that its campaign on Vietnam was outshone by better focused rivals. The Party, in Sweet's view, alternated between the needs of the parliamentary left, to which the British Council for Peace in Vietnam ministered, and the need to match the militancy of the far left.<sup>79</sup> It was VSC which stole the show when an estimated 100,000 demonstrated in London against the war in Vietnam in October 1968 and it was the Communist Party's Marxist competitors which seemed to be recruiting militant youth on the back of it.

As Colin Sweet informed John Gollan in August 1967 the Communists had militant rivals everywhere.

Whichever continent you turn to you find the same element ... which is demanding violent all-out struggle against imperialism and challenging the concept of peaceful coexistence. This is understood by the majority of the world's communist parties. This element exists not only in Africa, Asia and Latin America but in the United States and also in Britain and in the peace movement.<sup>80</sup>

Yet the BPC records show that the organisation was every bit as preoccupied with the growing anti-imperialist agenda as were CND or VSC. The Leeds Peace Committee, for example, wanted the whole of the BPC's 1966 congress to be devoted to Africa. The World Congress

general resolution had set the tone in 1965. It observed that 'imperialist aggression is not limited to Vietnam but embraces Laos and Cambodia'. It had pointed out that: 'In Africa Portuguese fascist colonialists with the aid of NATO are stepping up oppression in Angola, Mozambique, so-called Portuguese Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands'. The resolution also found space for mention of French Somalia, South Africa and the Congo – the points of imperialist conflict were numerous, but the picture was the same everywhere. BPC literature also linked the foreign policy of the Wilson Labour Governments to the maintenance of Britain's world role and the preservation of the sterling area. Disappointing economic and social policies at home were thus tied to foreign policy objectives:

Britain's support of the American war in Vietnam and of the cold war alliances – NATO, CENTO, and SEATO – has a direct connection with the wage freeze and the restrictive legislation. To challenge effectively the Prices and Incomes Bill, to defend our standard of living and the basic right to bargain freely with employers, we must also reject Mr. Wilson's Old Empire vision of Britain as a world banker and world military power.<sup>81</sup>

The argument, moreover, was beginning to gain converts within the Labour Party to the extent that its annual conference – for so long under the domination of the parliamentary and trade union leadership – was in open revolt against the Wilson Government's economic and foreign policies. A larger radical Left subscribed to the view that Britain's world role, its subservience to American foreign policy, the sterling area, its chronic balance of payments problem and the failure of the social democratic strategy for equality were all related. An alternative economic strategy for socialism was needed, it was argued, and this would recognise that an alternative foreign policy was integral to its success.<sup>82</sup>

## NOTES

1. Public Record Office, CAB129 Series, C(52)202, 'Britain's Overseas Obligations'. See S. Lucas, *Britain and Suez*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1996, p116.
2. R. P. Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1953.
3. As was pointed out by A. Imlah, *Economic Elements in the Pax Britannica*, Russell, New York 1958. I was unable to find a Communist review of this book.
4. Dutt, *Crisis of Britain*, emphasis in original, p67.
5. Bevin acknowledged this in Cabinet in October 1949. See his memo on 'European Policy', Public Record Office, CAB 129/37, CP(49)208.
6. The philanthropic view can be found in K. O. Morgan, *Labour in Power, 1945-51*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1984, p230 and F. S. Northedge, *Descent from Power: British Foreign Policy 1945-1973*,

London 1974, p221; the exploitative reality is depicted in D. K. Fieldhouse, 'The Labour Governments and the Empire-Commonwealth' in R. Ovendale (ed.), *The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments, 1945-51*, Leicester University Press, Leicester 1984, p95. Dutt claimed that the Attlee Government 'intensified colonial exploitation more heavily than any preceding Government of any political colour' (p343 of *The Crisis of Britain*).

7. Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain*, p318.
8. Ibid, pp326-7.
9. Ibid, p337.
10. Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain*, pp303-4.
11. For example in C. Barnett, *The Lost Victory*, London, Macmillan, 1995. In a general sense the feeling that something was wrong became quite pervasive in the early 1960s. *The Times*, 12 August 1961, fulminated, 'The British economy is sick. Internationally as a nation and domestically as individuals we are spending more than we are earning. Hitherto the deficit has been met by living on our fat. It is nearing the end. If we go on as we are the day will come when we shall be bankrupt'. Quoted in *Colonial Freedom News*, August-September 1961.
12. *New Statesman and Nation*, 5 April 1947 cited by Dutt, *The Crisis of Britain*, p406.
13. See, G. Lunestedt, 'Empire By Invitation? The United States and Western Europe, 1945-52', *Journal of Peace Research*, September 1986, pp263-77.
14. 'African Liberation Movements', International Affairs Committee, 4 March 1958.
15. 'Intervention of the US in British Affairs', May 1957; 'Conflicts Between British and US Imperialism', 22 November 1957, CP/CENT/INT/73/01.
16. This section is based on 'Report of the International Department', April 1951, CP/CENT/INT/66/01.
17. For security reasons the Department was directly responsible for contact with Egyptians, Iraqis and Sudanese resident in London in the 1950s. Much of its time was taken up with personal interviews of visiting Communists (mainly India, Pakistan, Ceylon and Africa) and colonial Communists resident in London. The Department was also asked to adjudicate between rival groups claiming to be the Communist Party of this or that country – Egypt, Nigeria, and Iraq provided particular problems of complexity.
18. In the early 1950s the Department maintained links with the Connolly Association, the Jewish Workers' Circle, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Colonial Defence Association (Cardiff), the Colonial People's Defence Association (Liverpool), the New International Association (Liverpool and Manchester), the Africa League (London and Birmingham), the West African Students' Union, the Nigeria Union, Gold Coast Union, Gambia League, East African Students' Federation, South African Students' Association, South African Indian Congress (London Secretariat), Caribbean Labour Congress (London and Leeds branches), West Indian Students' Union, League of Coloured Peoples, Indian Trade Union Defence Committee (London and Manchester), Federation of Indian Students, Ceylon Students' Association, Malayan Forum, Arab Students' Union, Egyptian Students Union, Committee for Cyprus

Affairs, League for Democracy in Greece, League for German Democracy and the many 'friendship' societies mentioned below.

19. The membership in 1953 included such stalwarts as Page Arnot, Dilip Bose, Kay Beauchamp, Ben Bradley, Desmond Buckle, Arthur Clegg, Idris Cox, Dutt, Desmond Greaves, H. B. Lim, Margot Parish, Barbara Ruheman, Sam Russell, Jack Woddis and Margaret Mynott. The membership does not appear to have been greatly affected by resignations after October 1956. Wolfe Arnold, R. Chandisingh, John Horner, John Moss, Margaret Mynott, Sheila O'Brien, Margot Parish, Bill Pindar and Billy Strachan served from April 1954 to March 1956, but are not mentioned on the next available record of attendance for June 1957 to May 1958, when the names of Claudia Jones, H. Bourne, E. H. Brown, Kit Meredith and Jack Woddis are added for the first time. But most, if not all, of this turnover was routine. The register for 1964-7 shows many of the same names – Page Arnot, Dutt, Beauchamp, Bellamy, Idris Cox, Desmond Greaves, Billy Strachan, Andrew Rothstein, Jack Woddis, Sam Russell, George Pefkos, Harry Bourne, Tom McWhinnie, Hugo Rathbone, John Williamson and Kit Meredith. Of the new names none carried any particular authority except Jimmy Reid and his was in another department of work.
20. Statement From International Department', 1 January 1952. CP/CENT/INT/66/01. On one of Dutt's two days the time was completely taken by committee work and on the other 'interviews and personal consultations'.
21. Maud Rogerson was full-time up to April 1951 but is not mentioned in connection with the International Department thereafter.
22. Probably from Margot Parish.
23. 'Report of the International Department', p4.
24. By 1966 the sub-committees on Africa and Asia had both ceased to function. The surviving sub-committees were concerned with the Caribbean, the Middle East, Irish and Jewish work. A fifth was being constructed on Latin America.
25. Nine members of whom 3 were Africans. For research purposes it created sub-committees on West Africa (mostly concerned with Nigeria), East Africa and South Africa. In 1951 the London District of the Party created an African and West Indian Advisory Committee which took on some of the organisational work in this area. A series of day schools was organised by the Africa Committee on such subjects as peace, the African and Indian national movements and China but the series began because of concern that 'Titoism' was spreading among the Africans in London. Klugmann was thus appointed to speak to the 'leading African comrades' of whom 25 attended a day school established for this purpose. Nigerian work grew to such an extent that a formal Nigeria sub-committee was recognised by the beginning of 1952. It is not mentioned in the report for 1953.
26. The Malaya Committee was formed to draw attention to the Emergency which was declared in 1948. By 1951 there was 'a general falling off in the Malaya campaign after its spurt around the second anniversary' of June 1950. The Committee complained of a 'failure to convince Party membership at practically all levels of their responsibilities on Malaya'. The good news was that the *Malayan Monitor* 'is now read as the best source of information on Malaya by democrats in all parts of the world'.

27. This co-ordinated the clutch of 'friendship' societies accumulated since the war – Bulgarian, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Rumanian, Yugoslav, British-Soviet, British-China, League for Democracy and so on.
28. The West Indies Committee had just six members in 1951 of whom four were from the larger West Indian islands. It maintained contact with individuals and movements in the Caribbean, ran a fortnightly West Indian educational group 'to which all known West Indian cardholders in London' were invited and maintained a Newsletter that had recently been quoted in the Trinidad Legislature.
29. 'Report of the International Department', 1951, p4.
30. *Ibid.*, p5.
31. 'Report to Political Committee', 25 June 1953, p8. and 'Report of International Affairs Committee to the Political Committee: Easter 1952 to January 1954', p1, CP/CENT/INT/66/01.
32. 'Report and Proposals to the International Affairs Committee', 1 May 1956, CP/CENT/INT/66/01. This report lists the following topics discussed monthly between June 1954 and March 1956; Ireland, United States, Nigeria, Middle East, Movement for Colonial Freedom, Coloured Workers in Britain, Gold Coast, Coloured Workers in Britain, Malaya and South East Asia, Gold Coast, Helsinki Peace Congress, Geneva Conference, United States, Middle East, Movement for Colonial Freedom, India, Nigeria and (March 1956) the CPSU Congress. The planned schedule for the rest of the year listed the Caribbean Federation, New aspects of the fight for independence and the alliance with colonial peoples, Nigeria, Economic aid and colonial development, Gold Coast, Middle East, Colonial Workers in Britain and, finally, the Movement for Colonial Freedom again.
33. 'Report to Political Committee', 25 June 1953, pp5-6. CP/CENT/INT/66/01.
34. See J. G. Darwin, *Britain and Decolonisation: The Retreat From Empire in the Post-War World*, Macmillan, London 1988, p149.
35. Set up in June 1948 in Paris. Fenner Brockway, who became Labour MP for Eton and Slough in 1950, served as its International Secretary.
36. 'Background to Events in Kenya', International Department, March 1953, CP/CENT/INT/40/01.
37. 'Report to the Political Committee', 25 June 1953, p3.
38. *Ibid.*, p9.
39. *Ibid.*, p9.
40. *Ibid.*, p9.
41. *Ibid.*, p9.
42. S. Howe, *Anti-colonialism in British Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1993, pp264-6.
43. 'Draft Report of the Political Committee', 10-11 November, 1956, CP/CENT/PC/02/33. Earlier that year Dutt had argued the same point in his 'Draft Report on the Disintegration of the Colonial System', 27 August 1956, a paper presented in closed discussion. K4 Volume 1955-57; British Library CUP 1262.
44. Indeed, the Fabian journal *Venture* (July 1958) attacked the Movement's policy on Malaya as being evidence of Communist influence.
45. For example, a conference on racial discrimination convened at the Beaver Hall, London on 24 November 1956 resolved to support Brockway's

Racial Discrimination Bill and encourage multi-racialism in schools. The MCR also tried to assist immigrants with housing and trade union organisation. In conjunction with Christian Action it launched a campaign against race discrimination in sport. See *Prod*, June 1958. In October of that year *Prod* reported on the race riots in Notting Hill and Nottingham. That month the London Area Council together with various trades councils organised two conferences on race discrimination. Ken Gill, then representing Willesden Trades Council, was one of the speakers. (Gill was still active in Liberation, the successor to the MCF, in the 1980s, by which time he was general secretary of AUEW/TASS and chair of the TUC's own committee on race). The NCCL also campaigned for legislation on race. Claudia Jones was one of the speakers at its conference on the 'Colour Bar' at Friends House, Euston Square in November 1959. The MCR brought trade unions and constituency labour parties together to discuss 'Inter-Racial Unity' and begin an agitation against racism in the same year.

46. Jack Woddis became the first open CPGB member to join the Movement's Central Council in 1961. Barbara Haq joined him in 1964. Solly Sachs, Barbara Ruheman and Sam Khan were prominent in the London Area Council from the 1950s. Kay Beauchamp was also prominent, editing *Liberation* in the 1970s and 80s; Barbara Haq became General Secretary in the late 1960s.
47. 'Problems of Neo-Colonialism and the Policy of the Two German States with Regard to the National Liberation Movement', W. Markov, April 1961, CP/CENT/73/01.
48. 'Report of the Work of the International Department', 2 March 1960. CP/CENT/INT/66/01.
49. See R. P. Dutt, 'National Liberation Today', *Marxism Today*, January 1964, p10.
50. 'Industrialisation of Africa', 8 May 1963, discussion document prepared for the Africa Committee of the IAC. CP/CENT/INT/66/01. Here, for example, it is said that 'without industrialisation Africa cannot solve any of her problems' but also that industrialisation depends on nationalisation (banking, trade, and foreign enterprise), a bigger state sector, economic planning and closer economic relations with the socialist countries.
51. 'Political Work Among the Indian Population in the UK', prepared for the Political Committee, 9 November 1963, CP/IND/DUTT/02/08.
52. Minutes of the AGM of the MCF, 22 January 1967, CP/IND/KAYB/01/03. Leon Szur and Jack Woddis published *What Is Neo-Colonialism?* (nd) under the auspices of the MCF.
53. 'Political Developments in Ireland', 9 February 1968, CP/CENT/INT/68.
54. *Ibid*, p4.
55. A. Winnington, *I Saw The Truth in Korea*, London, CPGB October 1950, p5.
56. Interview with Frank Watters, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 43, autumn 1981, p56.
57. British Peace Committee leaflet 1952, CP/CENT/PEA/01/01.
58. As reported in *Soviet News*, 6 January 1953.
59. Congress of Action For Peace, Free Trade Hall Manchester 16-17 May 1953, 'Information Material', CP/CENT/PEA/01/01.
60. See *New Statesman*, 27 March 1954, p404.

61. 'Interview with Edward Thompson', *Radical History Review*, 3, 4, 1976, p12.
62. A. Werth, 'Sartre and the Communists', *New Statesman*, 8 May 1954, p590.
63. See for example, P.M.S. Blackett in *New Statesman*, 13 February 1954, pp180-2.
64. John Foster Dulles and Field Marshall Montgomery were quoted in the *New York Times*, 22nd December 1954 advocating the feasibility of 'tactical' nuclear warfare while Denis Healey reiterated this nonsense in the defence debate of March 1955. 'Tories Prepare for Nuclear War', speaker's notes, 26 April 1955, CP/CENT/SPN/1/12.
65. See Barbara Castle, 'West does not want to disarm!', *Tribune*, 20 July 1956.
66. Executive Statement 1 September 1956, CP/CENT/PEA/01/14.
67. The relevant documents can be found in CP/CENT/PEA/01/14.
68. Schaffer was also a member of the WPC and a former political and industrial correspondent of *Reynolds News*. Bill Wainwright was the BPC's secretary.
69. Gordon Schaffer to the Executive of the BPC, 5 January 1957, CP/CENT/PEA/01/05.
70. 'Destroy the Bombs before they Destroy Us', *Tribune*, 24 May 1957.
71. 'H-Bomb and Disarmament Campaign', speaker's notes, 16 August 1957, CP/CENT/SPN/1/14.
72. H. Rolph, *Kingsley: the life, letters and diary of Kingsley Martin*, London, Gollancz, 1973, pp323-25.
73. Colin Sweet, 'Memorandum on the Peace Movement', nd. but probably 1966, CP/CENT/PEA/02/01. According to Sweet the liaison committee had expired by 1966 and given way to informal links.
74. M. Phythian, 'CND's Cold War', *Contemporary British History*, 15, 3, autumn 2001, pp133-56.
75. Colin Sweet to John Gollan, 25 August 1967, CP/CENT/PEA/02/01.
76. 'Vietnam - Focus of the WPC', Andrew Walker, July 1965, CP/CENT/PEA/02/01
77. This was admitted by the General Purposes Committee of the BPC meeting on 8 April 1967. Joan Gabriel said 'the spontaneous movement is no longer present ... the movement was on a more political basis and its objectives and methods of mobilisation required careful review', CP/CENT/PEA/02/01.
78. 'Memorandum on the WPC', by I.M., probably Ivor Montagu, in CP/CENT/PEA/02/01.
79. Colin Sweet to John Gollan, 6 March 1969, CP/CENT/PEA/02/02.
80. Colin Sweet to John Gollan, 25 August 1967, CP/CENT/PEA/02/01.
81. BPC pamphlet *Your Wages and 'Britain's World Role'*, in CP/CENT/PEA/02/01
82. J. Hughes, 'An Alternative Policy for Labour', *New Left Review*, 24, 1964, pp5-32; R. Pryke, *Though Cowards Flinch: An Alternative Economic Strategy*, McKibbon and Kee, London 1967; Tribune and various trade unions also moved in this direction in 1968. See J. Callaghan, 'Rise and Fall of the Alternative Economic Strategy', *Contemporary British History*, 14, 3, autumn 2000, pp105-31.

## 5. Economic Perspectives on Britain

Communist thinking about the UK economy in the 1950s and 1960s was dominated by arguments about its long-term decline and tendencies to imminent recession. The Party's expectation of imminent capitalist crisis in the 1950s was simply wrong and it was no consolation that it shared this error with many Keynesian economists when the cry was first sounded in 1948.<sup>1</sup> For the next ten years the annual economic report prepared by the Economic Committee either repeated this error or left it uncorrected. On occasions, as in 1950, the onset of economic crisis was linked to the theory of the general crisis of capitalism, the ruling Soviet doctrine. This theory of 'general crisis' was proof against empirical evidence. It essentially specified that capitalism must be in crisis because it had entered an epoch characterised by the growth of monopolies and the state – which allegedly served to sap capitalism of its creative dynamic – while the world capitalist market was subject to shrinkage as the socialist bloc expanded and anti-imperialist movements undermined the system at the point where its super-profits were made. The perceived superiority of the Soviet socialist economy was the bedrock of this faith. As early as 1950 Soviet postwar reconstruction was said to have proceeded to the point where the living standards of ordinary workers were 'rising above the standards of their British counterparts':

Not only have they the advantages of security of employment and magnificent social services, but the consumption of many commodities by the Soviet worker, particularly of food, now surpasses that in Britain. This has created an entirely new situation.<sup>2</sup>

The persuasive power of the theory of general crisis of capitalism was not however dependent on superior levels of socialist consumption, or evidence of slump in the capitalist world at any particular moment. The expectation was rather that stagnation at home (proceeding from the growth both of monopolies and of the state sector), combined with the expansion of socialism and national liberation abroad, would deprive

capitalism of opportunities for accumulation in the long run. This was analytically distinct from the ordinary cyclical crises which had always punctuated capitalist development.<sup>3</sup> It was a crisis of this latter sort that the Party perennially predicted from 1948 until the Norland Branch submitted a resolution to the twenty-fifth national congress ten years later demanding a critical reappraisal of its post-war economic analyses.<sup>4</sup> The reappraisal was duly conducted in a genuine spirit of self-criticism. But a problem clearly persisted afterwards because John Gollan wrote to the Economic Committee in 1960 asking for further clarification 'of our picture of where the capitalist economy is going' bearing in mind, as he pointed out, 'the difficulty which confronts the average comrade ... that in the fifteen years since 1945, he has not seen a crisis of the nature of the 1930/31 slump, and this lends substance to the theories of the people who say that capitalism has changed'.<sup>5</sup> The problem in short was precisely the absence of economic crises and it was here that the theory of the general crisis could help out. You might not be able to see the crisis, but it was happening anyway and it was more than just the slump phase of the business cycle – it was the long-term constriction of the bases of capitalist accumulation.

Faith was not enough, however, as the critical resolution at the twenty-fifth congress showed. Although the relatively limited recessions recorded in the USA in 1948–9, 1951–3, 1953–4 and 1957–8 were greeted with prophecies of crisis by mainstream economists too, it was no compliment to Marxists that they made the same mistakes as their enemies. Communists believed that they saw further and more clearly than their opponents. Moreover it was integral to Marxist theory that an objective world existed outside the realm of wishful thinking. Changes in this material world were ultimately decisive in politics and it was the Party's business to situate its interventions in this real context – which first meant understanding it. The critical re-examination of economic analyses and forecasts conducted by the Economic Committee in the summer of 1958 found the main theoretical error to reside in 'a crude theory of under-consumption'. This had led to 'economism', it was said, and an anxiety to find 'theoretical justification for the wages struggle'. This must have hit a raw nerve. Since the Party's decisive interventions were thought to be in the unions, it could hardly be denied that theories which justified wage militancy served a useful purpose.

Pollitt had set out a full-employment rationale for post-war wage militancy in *How to Win the Peace* (1944). While recognising that the ruling class had learned lessons on the need to avoid mass unemployment – an argument which he repeated in *Answers to Questions* (1945) – Pollitt's reasoning was that successful wage militancy would keep up demand and help to offset any inbuilt recessionary influences in the capitalist economy. The 'fight for an increase in the living standards of the people' became one of the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions

for the achievement of full employment when the 'problem of full employment' was analysed by Communists in 1947.<sup>6</sup> The idea that the enlightened self-interest of the ruling class might help in the avoidance of slump was soon jettisoned. In 1946 the Party returned to predictions of an imminent crash of the US economy.<sup>7</sup> Even in the midst of the fuel crisis of 1947 – vivid demonstration of shortages though it was – the Party had been unable to resist references to a coming crisis of over-production in the USA, while Pollitt in the same year predicted a crisis of under-consumption in Britain in his book *Looking Ahead*.<sup>8</sup> The onset of the Cold War meant *ipso facto* that the necessary political conditions for peace, reconstruction and full employment had gone. The monopolies of America and Britain, it was increasingly stressed, ensured that unemployment was inescapable. The US crisis was forecast throughout 1948 and seemed to be actually in progress during the recession and dollar shortage of 1949. But John Eaton and J. R. Campbell continued to see crisis where there was none during the course of 1950 – the US economy having recovered even before the Korean War opened in June of that year. Rearmament followed and during the course of 1951 material shortages and inflation were predicted by Party economists as its likely outcomes.<sup>9</sup> The Party had been in any case determined to bust the wage freeze adopted in 1948 by the Labour Government and by the time the Conservatives were returned to power in October 1951 Bert Ramelson, at that time based in West Yorkshire, warned readers of *World News and Views* of the danger of a return to the thirties. This dire warning was, however, only the beginning; economic crisis remained a perennial Party theme for the rest of the decade.<sup>10</sup>

## THE BRITISH ECONOMY

Sustained economic growth and full employment during the 1950s provided persuasive evidence for many people – notably the Labour Party's intellectual leadership – that capitalism had changed its spots. Advocacy of this argument was proof of revisionism and class collaboration in Communist eyes. In coming to terms with reality, however, the Party had to make sense of the 'Keynesian mixed economy'. This apparently successful formula had won the allegiance of both major political parties by the mid-1950s, though not of their militants – the Labour Left, for example, had as many objections to the mixed economy as the Communists and frequently scoffed at its self-evident foolishness.<sup>11</sup>

Communists acknowledged that the Keynesian theory was 'a step towards reality' as compared with the mystifications which preceded it.<sup>12</sup> After all, it recognised that there was no necessary connection between savings and investment and no automatic tendency to produce a full employment equilibrium. 'The avidity with which the social democratic leaders and theoreticians have seized upon the Keynesian

'teachings' was not unexpected. For, as the rather surprising admission put it, 'Here is a way of getting most of the benefits of socialism without attacking capitalism, without facing the rigours of the class struggle'. But the Keynesian theory was also in this view 'the child of the general crisis of capitalism', the product of its increasing reliance on forms of state intervention and of the challenge of socialism. The contradiction between productive capacity and purchasing power being endemic to capitalism, Keynes had looked to the state to stand above the classes, regulating things in the public interest. But the actual state was for Communists far from being a wise, impartial umpire and the actual capitalist economy was susceptible to being 'torn asunder by struggles between workers and capitalists, between national groups of capitalists battling for trade and empire and between the exploiting capitalist groups and the colonial peoples'.

The Communists remained convinced that crises inhered in the very structure of capitalism, in the contradiction between the social character of production and the private appropriation of the product. But they also saw that wage controls were implicated in the Keynesian maintenance of full employment. Here was an opportunity for practical intervention, if only of an oppositional character, and it was one that was actually adopted – as we shall see in chapter eight. Communists also argued, as did the Polish Marxist Michael Kalecki (who worked with Keynes), that it was 'by no means certain that the capitalist class as a whole favour full employment' for 'while they do not want a slump of devastating proportions, they do want a reserve of labour of around one million which will restore "fear of the sack"' and act as 'a barrier in the way of wage movements'. The Party would constantly warn of this in its industrial propaganda. It also expected that from the menu of possible Keynesian policies, the established parties would choose those most favourable to business and the rich – eschewing higher taxes on the wealthy, for example, while favouring subsidies and other incentives to influence business behaviour. Class struggle around the budget would thus persist as it always had done.

As part of its anti-American campaign Communist propaganda could warn of the threat to 'our trade' and 'our factories' represented by US business.<sup>13</sup> During the early Cominform period, as we have noted, Britain was depicted as the junior ally of American imperialism, but also as an ally that was resentful of US incursions into its markets and spheres of domination. Economic rivalry between Britain and the USA had been a theme of Communist political economy since 1919 and Britain had been analysed as a declining imperial power over the whole period. Throughout the 1950s the Party drew attention to Britain's continuing exploitation of its colonies through mechanisms such as the sterling balances – the forced loans accumulated since the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>14</sup> Intensification of colonial exploitation and repression was just one aspect of the crisis of British

imperialism and the British economy. The twin crises were linked in several ways. Communists held that the British economy was distorted in the interests of finance capital, to the detriment of domestic investment. The institutional dominance of the City was a central feature of Britain's imperial legacy in the Communist view and determined Conservative Government policy in the 1950s. While Britain's imperialist position had 'seriously deteriorated' at the end of the Second World War, the City's dominance had not. Though Britain's chronic balance of payments problem had produced six sterling crises in the Party's reckoning by 1958, post-war policy was concerned to maintain sterling as an instrument of imperial finance and to undertake an overseas military burden which the country could not afford.<sup>15</sup>

In the early 1950s the Party saw Britain's defence of the sterling area as a feature of the 'Anglo-American antagonism'. The USA, it was argued, sought to impose sterling convertibility as a way of prising open colonial markets hitherto dominated by Britain. The USA also wanted to force Britain to become part of its drive for the economic integration of Western Europe. This was depicted as part of the US plan to enfeeble British imperialism and to prepare Western Europe as an anti-Soviet military bloc and field of US investment. The USA used its dominance within the Bretton Woods institutions – the IMF, World Bank and dollar-gold standard – together with the GATT, the Marshall Plan and NATO to build up West German and Japanese capitalism as rivals to Britain.<sup>16</sup> British imperialism, meanwhile, had to obtain export surpluses big enough to expand the world role of British finance capital and this urgent necessity was something which the Communists repeatedly connected to their predictions of an impending assault on working-class living standards within Britain, as well as to the evidence of repression and increased exploitation emanating from the colonies. We saw in chapter four that the Communist analysis of British imperialism had to change significantly from the beginning of the 1960s. Here it is important to emphasise that the focus of the Party's economic analysis was from that time increasingly concerned with Britain's poor economic performance and the search for an alternative economic strategy for the Left.

One area of continuity, however, was the Party's perception of the wages struggle. In 1951 the Party admitted that compared with 1939 'the working class is a little better off' and that earnings had risen more than prices since 1947. Unemployment was down to 300,000 compared to the 1,710,000 recorded in 1939. It was nevertheless predicted that a sharp decline in living standards was imminent and that government policy would be to allow an inflation of at least 7.5 per cent that year.<sup>17</sup> The coming attack on living standards was a theme of the Party's economic surveys of 1952, 1953, 1954 and 1955. Inflation was identified as having been 'enormously profitable for both industry and the banks' during the period 1945-55 in the context of both an expanding

world trade and the absence of German and Japanese competition. Inflation was seen as the *cause* of 'a powerful wage drive', rather than its effect. This wage drive had been made possible by nearly full employment which had strengthened the unions and weakened the hand of the employers who yearned for a larger pool of the unemployed.<sup>18</sup> The Chancellor of the Exchequer, R. A. Butler, was able to boast that GDP had grown by 20 per cent between 1948 and 1954 and that at current rates of growth the standard of living of British workers would double by 1979. But the Party stuck to its guns arguing in 1955 that 'the British economy showed many of the features of a capitalist boom nearing its peak' and that 'the Tories are planning to cripple the wages movement by creating unemployment'.<sup>19</sup>

As we have seen most aspects of Communist economic analysis provided a rationale for wage militancy. According to the Party's economists Keynesian theory required cuts in working-class living standards during boom periods;<sup>20</sup> so did Britain's imperial position, since it allegedly depended on the strength of sterling rather than domestic expansion. The annual forecast of recession also gave urgency to the Party's fight for higher wages, as I noted earlier. Its trade union militants were advised to treat the government's cost of living index with scepticism and to compile their own figures, while treating the current distribution of incomes as a reflection of the balance of class forces in industry and not the result of immutable economic laws or of abstract principles of justice. All these considerations, according to Henry Collins in 1954, suggested that 'it will be necessary to make further inroads into surplus value' in the future.<sup>21</sup> For all this, by the end of the 1950s the Communists could see that inflation had become a 'semi-permanent' feature of the system and that British capitalism suffered from problems of uncompetitiveness as compared to West Germany and Japan – and 'even France'. John Eaton, for example, agreed with some of the observations J. K. Galbraith made in *The Affluent Society* (1959) concerning the role of state management of economic growth in the generation of inflation.<sup>22</sup> The system generated its own demand and created new wants but was kept buoyant by state managers fearful of slump and intent on evading the distributional conflicts that would ensue when economic growth faltered. Communists saw that inflation was having a corroding effect and that state managers might ultimately take the political risks involved in curbing it. They could see that inflationary trends provided a rationale for a campaign to control incomes, cut public expenditure and rein in the unions.<sup>23</sup> In the long run, a report of 1961 reasoned, 'the obvious disruptive economic and social effects of inflation are too serious for the State to allow it to continue indefinitely ...'.<sup>24</sup>

The Conservative Government had actually been issuing annual calls for wage restraint since the 1956 White Paper on 'The Economic Implications of Full Employment'. John Eaton recognised that this was

'an important document' and saw the case presented as an argument for 'the old Wage Freeze policy'. The White Paper linked high domestic consumption, high incomes and inflation to Britain's balance of payments problems, arguing that British products were being made uncompetitive in world markets, while foreign goods were increasingly added to the import bill. Eaton argued that import controls were ruled out as a policy option in the interests of maintaining sterling's role as an international currency. Financial interests in any case were 'dominant in the determination of the present Government's policy' in this view and these would support nothing that obstructed the narrow interests of finance. But Eaton believed that controls had the potential to win great popular support and repudiated the idea that Britain was being priced out of international markets by high wage costs. Government economic policy and chronically low levels of industrial investment were far bigger culprits in this view. Indeed this was why Eaton concluded that 'the struggle for the improvement of real wages is bound, if it is realistically conducted, to merge with the struggle against capitalist domination of national economic policy'. Though he conceded that the wages struggle, under capitalist conditions, could produce only ephemeral results, 'the opposite policy of reducing or restraining wages is beneficial only to a narrow section of the capitalist class and is harmful directly to the working class and to the great majority of the nation. In existing circumstances, therefore, a policy of struggle for higher wages is the best policy available but it is a policy of transition only and if it is to yield any lasting results it must be used as a stepping stone to more radical transformations of the national economy. It is only by such radical transformations that full employment can be secured on a lasting basis.'<sup>25</sup>

The TUC had annually repudiated government exhortations for wage restraint, together with such anti-inflationary measures as were actually taken such as the credit squeeze introduced by Peter Thorneycroft, the Tory Chancellor. The announcement in July 1957 of the Government's intention to establish a Council on Prices, Productivity and Incomes was greeted with suspicion within the unions. Though deflationary policies were relaxed somewhat in the run up to the general election of October 1959, evidence of official disquiet with 'free collective bargaining' continued to accumulate. In 1960 the TUC itself condemned unofficial strikes and expressed concern about the evidence of an emerging shop stewards' movement. The Federation of British Industries meanwhile announced itself a convert to tripartite corporatism in the spring of 1961 in the hope that institutionalised wage restraint and planned growth would emerge as the long-term benefits of such arrangements. The new Chancellor, Selwyn Lloyd, brought the TUC and the employers together for preparatory talks within months of this announcement and by March 1962 the National Economic Development Council had held its inaugural meeting. All

this was accompanied by various 'pay pauses' and 'guiding lights' intended to regulate wage growth. Then in July 1962 Macmillan unveiled his plan for a National Incomes Commission. Almost exactly a year later the Labour Party responded with its own plan for an incomes policy. Within months of the formation of a Labour Government in October 1964, Harold Wilson announced the establishment of a Royal Commission on trade unions to be chaired by Lord Donovan, while George Brown, Deputy Prime Minister, established a Prices and Incomes Board. More 'wage norms', 'compulsory early warning' schemes, and dire threats followed, culminating in the six month wage freeze of September 1966.

The 'more radical transformation' of the national economy that John Eaton referred to in 1956 remained a distant prospect and was in no sense linked to Communist wage militancy. The best statements of the Communist rationale for wage militancy could only connect it to proposals for structural change in the economy as an aspiration. Trade unions were not created to change the capitalist system. Militancy was simply 'good trade union practice'; unions had to 'uninhibitedly play the market' where they could, while seeking to overcome such divisions between them as they could.<sup>26</sup> By 1965 there were Communists, dissatisfied with these banalities, who wanted a reappraisal of the Party's attitude to wages, incomes policy and inflation. Bill Warren (aka William McCullum) led this rethink at two conferences held by the Party's Economic Committee. At the first of these, in October 1965, the liveliest debates witnessed clashes of opinion on several key issues including inflation, the proper estimation of how far British imperialism had degenerated and on the need for a more comprehensive and immediate programme for the Left. Though the record of these proceedings is little more than an impressionistic sketch it is clear that Warren argued that inflation was an effect of strong trade unions in conditions of full employment, conditions which allowed firms to pass on their increased costs to consumers. It was bad for business, Warren argued, because it damaged Britain's international competitiveness. But inflation also drew attention to the limitations of mere trade union action, which stood revealed – or at any rate soon would be exposed – as akin to the treadmill. In Warren's view once the workers began to see the futility of mere wage militancy they could begin to understand the nature of capitalist exploitation if Communists, eschewing mere wage militancy themselves, adopted bolder ambitions to encroach on managerial prerogatives and raise a programme of structural reforms designed to address the chronic defects of the British economy at their source.<sup>27</sup> This argument was currently favoured within the milieu of the Institute of Workers' Control (created in 1964) based in Nottingham – enough to discredit it in the eyes of some Communists, who feared rival centres of left influence in the unions, particularly involving renegades and Trotskyists. Others doubted the

optimistic strategic conclusion drawn in Warren's analysis. But the real controversy concerned the idea that Communists might support an incomes policy as a necessary part of the proposed 'strategic' approach. Warren, joined by Ian Steedman, argued that an incomes policy would help to stimulate an argument about the proper distribution of incomes. A similar contention surfaced at the Labour Party's annual conference in 1965, when Royden Harrison and Stephen Yeo moved for acceptance of an incomes policy linked to price controls, redistributory policies and a list of specified reforms. For its left advocates, an incomes policy could be more than the mere fraud or racket which Party propaganda frequently denounced. It could have a 'rational kernel' – namely to restore competitiveness and obviate the need for the Stop phase of the Stop-Go policy which successive governments, faced with balance of payments crises, had resorted to since the Second World War.

Maurice Dobb supplied some ammunition to the reformers by arguing that inflation was a feature of the economic workings of capitalism in the new objective situation that had unfolded since 1945. He invoked the analyses of the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU in 1956 to supply authority to his argument, but it essentially acknowledged what the Party had spent much of the post-war period denying – that periodic deflationary tides had been supplanted by a 'fairly constant inflationary pressure'. This derived, in Dobb's view, from the new global balance of class forces which compelled the ruling class in the West to prioritise economic growth and full employment. This in turn had led to growing public expenditure, high and sustained levels of investment and a condition of excess demand for capital goods. Full employment had also resulted in a level of demand for consumer goods 'which has tended to be ahead of the productive capacity of this sector of industry'. The upshot was that the industrial reserve army of labour had disappeared and with it had gone 'the traditional instrument whereby wages were kept down'.<sup>28</sup> Capitalism was thus more prone to crises of an inflationary type than the traditional crises of the pre-war period. None of this necessarily suggested that the Party should advocate an incomes policy in return for structural reforms but it was subtle heresy none the less because it contradicted much of what the Party had been saying and doing in the previous fifteen years.

Warren pressed again for a comprehensive Left alternative to the Labour Government's economic policies at a Party weekend conference around the theme of 'Britain's Economic Problems', which took place in October 1966.<sup>29</sup> He rejected the Government's National Plan as 'anti-democratic' and argued for a re-examination of the idea of workers' control, a process already being promoted by the Institute for Workers' Control (with significant, though unofficial trade union support). The IWC was also a forum for advocates of the 'structural reforms' strategy as we have seen. Warren, following this logic, also

questioned the Party's stance on nationalisation arguing that it could become 'a diversion of political energy' unless it was properly situated within 'an overall economic policy' positing the transition to socialism. An alternative economic policy was needed to take account of the fact that overall economic performance was susceptible to conscious manipulation. In effect Warren was saying 'yes, it is possible to manage the capitalist economy – let us do so in a radical way'. The struggle to achieve immediate aims could thus be linked to a struggle over the way in which the state controlled the economy. Immediate demands could in this way be connected to the struggle for a socialist economy. To do this properly Party policy had to become responsible. This meant more than opposition for opposition's sake as exemplified in Bert Ramelson's denunciation of Government policy, *Incomes Policy, The Great Wages Freeze Trick* (1966), which demanded improved wages and a simultaneous price freeze. Ramelson's preferred cocktail of measures was likely to result, according to Warren, in factory closures and 'general economic chaos'.<sup>30</sup> Warren believed that this could be avoided because the working class appreciated that 'the struggle for higher real wages is limited by overall economic performance'. It was possible then to promote policies that would get this improved performance and – as long as it was recognised that this involved a raft of measures directly concerned to improve productivity – an incomes policy had a role to play as a component of the transition.

Warren's arguments recognisably anticipated the alternative economic strategy of the 1970s which CP, as well as Labour and trade union economists, had a hand in developing. They combined neo-Keynesian ideas of planned growth with socialist ideas for economic transformation. Warren took the Party's declared parliamentary reformism seriously by realising that the Left – which the Party aspired to lead intellectually – needed a credible programme for the successful management of a mixed economy while at the same time subjecting that economy to a programme capable of transforming it.<sup>31</sup> New thinking in the British Party was increasingly inspired by Italian precedent in the 1960s, as well as Marxist thinking outside the organisation.<sup>32</sup> Italian Communists were faced with similar problems but were much closer to power than the CPGB and were accordingly forced to think about the problems of governing. In Britain though the Communists were remote from power they had long aspired to lead the Left intellectually.

But on the question of incomes policy the Party's industrial experts held sway. Campbell reminded everybody in 1966 that 'if we raise a clamour for an incomes policy, we are in effect raising a clamour for disciplining the unions'.<sup>33</sup> This was still anathema. The incomes policy would inevitably turn against the working class whereas the Party wanted attention focused on 'the monopolists'. The correct way to do this in relation to the inflationary problem, according to Campbell,

reiterating a familiar argument from the 1950s, was to concentrate on Britain's poor productivity record. At the 1966 conference Ramelson argued that an incomes policy would only aggravate the contraction of demand that the Labour Government's policies had already effected, when what was needed was action to stimulate growth and productivity.<sup>34</sup> The old argument seems to have won. When the next weekend conference considered 'The Advance to a Socialist Economy' in September 1967, it was argued that 'a left progressive policy must be prepared to promote all actions to improve wages and salaries and conditions generally and to safeguard the unions from repressive legislation'.<sup>35</sup>

Mounting conflict between the unions and the Labour Government, together with the prospect of an intensification of such strife should the Conservative Opposition return to office, strengthened the case for militant trade unionism. The Party stressed that a total wage freeze for six months followed by a near total wage freeze for a further six months were unprecedented attacks on working-class living standards and that the much-threatened devaluation would also cut the purchasing power of real wages when it was finally implemented. It also emphasised that the advocates of devaluation linked it to deflationary measures designed to deliberately increase unemployment.<sup>36</sup> It was also evident, as Richard Crossman admitted when addressing a Labour conference in Middlesborough, that 'there has to be in any case bigger inroads by the Government into collective bargaining'.<sup>37</sup> The prospect was thus for further government intervention to weaken the unions. Warren's argument that a wages policy could be bargained in return for a Labour Government commitment to economic planning and economic justice was something that formed the basis of the Social Contract in the 1970s, though the ambitions of the Social Contract were nothing like as bold as the transformation of capitalism sought by the CP reformers. Indeed when the Social Contract arrived many Communists, following the lead given by Bert Ramelson, regarded it as a 'social con-trick', pure and simple. The whole thrust of Communist efforts since the war had been to bring about a radicalisation via wage militancy and gain control of the block vote at the Labour Party conference; now that the long awaited left turn in the unions had arrived, it was hoped that the arrangements that had marginalised the Party since the war would begin to unravel. It was thus the worst possible time to advocate calling off wage militancy which was still seen as the best wedge to drive between the Labour leadership and the trade unions. In any of the years between 1951 and 1968 the real prospects for strengthening the Party by a strategy such as Warren's never looked more convincing than Campbell's and Ramelson's alternative of wage militancy. The real ambition of this latter approach was to build Communist strength in the unions; the real ambition of the former was to exercise an intellectual leadership over the whole left.

The Communist Party talked as if it aspired to do both of these things simultaneously but in practice it pursued wage militancy whether or not this helped its other objectives.

It can be seen from what has been said already that the Communist Party's economic analysis was nevertheless much more than a case for wage militancy. Ideas proposing greater state control of the economy had been suggested at intervals throughout the period on such issues as trade and the movement of capital, and were by no means confined to Communists.<sup>38</sup> By the mid-60s the Party acknowledged that 'it has been relatively easy for state economic policy in capitalist countries to avoid prolonged crises of general over-production', but problems were identified in the international monetary system which 'threatened the whole edifice of the ... system' in the near future.<sup>39</sup> So far as Britain was concerned the Party continued to emphasise 'the imperialist character of its economy' which lay at the heart of its chronic balance of payments problems. The net export of capital and excessive overseas military expenditures were two of the manifestations of this old imperialist orientation. The trade deficit itself was explained as a function of these burdens as well as an effect of the stop-go policy that gave priority to the defence of sterling. These arguments, propounded tirelessly throughout the period, were also echoed within the Labour left and even the not-so-left by the mid-1960s.<sup>40</sup> The Party rubbed the idea that wage rises had anything to do with the problem. Instead it advocated import and capital controls, more public ownership, a programme of social reforms, military cuts, price and investment controls, and greater trade with the commonwealth countries and the socialist world. By 1968, it was associated with the argument that short-term financial interests dominated British economic policy at the expense of long-term industrial regeneration; that Britain had pursued a world financial role (the sterling area) and had maintained overseas military commitments to the detriment of its home economy and balance of payments; that chronically low private investment was related to the Stop-Go policies which successive governments had resorted to in defence of sterling; that managed capitalism in Britain was an 'abject failure' in its neglect, perversion and virtual sabotage of the nationalised sector and in its inability to modernise what had become a 'relatively backward' manufacturing sector; that this backwardness was related to the country's 'comparative neglect of technical and scientific education'; and that British interests would be ill-served by membership of the Common Market. Most of these themes of Communist analysis emerged during the 1950s; some, indeed, went back much further. As the rhetoric of the 'general crisis of imperialism' and allied 'Marxist-Leninist' assumptions receded, the recurring themes were gradually refashioned into a language of alternative policies which the Party could share with the Labour left.

## THE COMMON MARKET

From the time of the Party's first consideration of the Common Market in 1957 it was identified as 'a device of German and American monopoly capitalism to increase their grip on the industry and trade of Western Europe'.<sup>41</sup> It was a divisive factor certain to perpetuate Cold War Europe. It would hamper the development of East-West trade. It was 'a certain menace to British trade in Europe'. The Party never relinquished these views in the period considered here. It was not enough for Britain to refuse to enter the Common Market; 'It should seek by direct negotiations with some of the states involved to prevent this organisation ... from coming into being'. Britain should favour all-European trade and seek to break down existing barriers to trade with the socialist bloc. In 1957, when the Commonwealth still took 48 per cent of Britain's exports, the Party called for resistance to US penetration of these markets. It also talked of the need to assist the economic development of the colonies and former colonies, of ending the sterling balances and all arrangements that made for unequal exchange, while maintaining the system of imperial preference unless its termination was desired by 'the governments and peoples' of the states affected. This sort of argument was heard less as the years passed; so was the Soviet-inspired contention that the Common Market and NATO were all of a piece – instruments for the integration of West Germany into a Western military bloc. But such arguments were never repudiated or formally consigned to the dustbin of history. They lingered on instead.

But other objections grew in status with time. An example was the argument that 'The right of a British government to control economic policy is fundamental to Britain's future, and must not be surrendered. Policies which interfere with the Government's right to control imports, to promote the development of industry and to take the necessary measures to develop trade and correct balance of payments difficulties must be decisively rejected'.<sup>42</sup> But it was a slow process by which the Party clarified its thinking on the issue. The decision to apply for membership of the Common Market, taken by the Macmillan Government in the summer of 1961, was rightly described as 'momentous' and in accordance 'with the long-term interests of British monopoly capitalism'. The annual economic report of the Party's Economic Committee in 1962 contained a section entitled 'The Economic Strategy of the Ruling Class' which explained these interests as consisting of two main planks. One of these involved 'further weakening democracy in Britain', by reducing the role of Parliament and attacking working-class organisations. The other, bizarrely, was supposed to entail drawing in 'West European and especially German capital, to assist them [the monopoly capitalists] in maintaining their imperial position'. Though Empire had given way to Commonwealth and most of the Commonwealth now consisted of politically independent states the report insisted that 'the exploitation of the peoples of

the Commonwealth by British capitalism is maintained, and has even been intensified in recent years'. But Britain, according to this analysis, no longer had the means of maintaining its position unaided:

By joining the Common Market the British Monopolists hope to draw in the German Monopolists as partners in the looting of those vast areas of the world covered by the Empire and Commonwealth.<sup>43</sup>

Dutt insisted at a meeting of the International Affairs Committee in July 1962 that the reversal of Britain's attitude to the EEC stemmed from the weakening of British imperialism.<sup>44</sup> But he attached no significance to the absolute and proportionate growth of its trade with Western Europe. His 'positive reasons' for Britain's application to join the Six gave first place to the old Cold War argument that 'the Common Market is not only a trading bloc but is an alliance against Socialism in Europe'. One of the contributors to his *Labour Monthly* described it as the economic foundation of a new 'anti-Komintern Pact'.<sup>45</sup> Dutt also calculated that the British hoped to enhance their status with the USA and play a dominant role in the EEC by using 'the contradictions' between West Germany and France. There was also 'The desire to cash in on the new forms of exploitation of African countries for which the Common Market has been formed'. As if nothing had changed since the 1940s, Dutt insisted that: 'The whole conception of a United Europe lies in developing the enormous resources of Africa, described as the southern extension of Europe.' This was harking back to arguments current at the time of the Marshall Plan. He even tried to explain factionalism within the Conservative Party in terms of the different calculations of those who saw Africa as the main chance and those who were clinging on to 'the older Commonwealth countries'. He concluded by observing that since the Common Market was a 'counterpart of NATO' 'any opposition for whatever reason is a positive factor in the fight, and in that sense progressive'. It was thus necessary to mobilise 'all our lines of argument' and promote 'our alternative policy – to enlarge trade between East and West, with the advancing Socialist world and the new African countries'.

Andrew Rothstein, another of the old guard, agreed with Dutt at this meeting, believing that 'the war danger' and the 'political aims' of the Common Market were 'the strongest cards' to play. Harry Bourne also agreed, but added that since the political aims of the original six members had been constant, the change in British attitudes had to turn on economic considerations. John Williamson observed that 'It is not at all clear that all sections of British industry are going to suffer setbacks'. Idris Cox noted that 'Trade with the dominions and former colonies has been dropping for some years and has been growing with the six Common Market countries'. He spoiled this insight however by

attaching more significance to the fact that 'Britain's trade with Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria is going down, while that of West Germany with these countries is going up'. From this he inferred that Britain was proposing to enter 'into ... jungle warfare against Western Germany to exploit afresh the African countries'. The precis of his argument contained in the manuscripts sheds no further light on his logic but it is reasonable to conclude that Cox, like Rothstein, also agreed with Dutt. Hugo Rathbone certainly did, saying that 'Africa is the key in the move towards the Common Market'. The only recorded dissenting voice was Barbara Ruehemann's. She reminded everyone that the preferential trading arrangements between Britain and the Commonwealth that were now to be scrapped had been adopted from a position of weakness thirty years before. The ability to dispense with them suggested a position of strength. Britain was not entering the Common Market in order to abandon the Commonwealth but in order to sabotage the Common Market, she concluded – a conclusion, famously, which General de Gaulle had also drawn.

These were not the only voices on this subject of course. Some were soon to be heard complaining that Dutt's analysis of British imperialism in crisis – which informed some of the judgements expressed above – simplified and exaggerated the economic significance of the colonies.<sup>46</sup> This issue has already been touched upon in chapter four where I made the observation that new theories of imperialism were beginning to supplant the old Leninist-Stalinist views of Dutt and the old guard in the 1960s. The main observation to make here is that the Party lacked a coherent view of the Common Market issue, while its standard analysis of imperialism explained less and less of what was happening in the world. Fragments of more useful analysis appeared, however. Sam Aaronovitch and John Eaton, for example, stressed the significance of the emergence of the Common Market as the product of the *competitive struggle* of rival monopoly capitalisms which had furthered the economic integration of Western Europe in practice. While in Moscow for the conference on 'Problems of Contemporary Capitalism' in 1962, they argued that British entry would accelerate the process of creative destruction in the domestic economy as the shrinkage of old industries and the growth of more dynamic sectors was speeded up. This still amounted to 'a policy of national betrayal' in Aaronovitch's judgement but at least his view of what was happening dispensed with the old line that it was all about pursuing an American Cold War agenda and the consolidation of West European exploitation of Africa. Aaronovitch saw that the politics of the process were connected to the interests of the big firms and that the big firms were increasingly making their money within the advanced capitalist nations.<sup>47</sup> One of his pertinent observations at the Moscow conference concerned the need for transnational trade union collaboration in an age of increasingly transnational firms.

From the beginning of the controversy the Party had to address the basic economic and social issues affected by the question of Britain's entry in ways that would be relevant to trade unionists and the activist left. As early as 1961, for example, it was observed that the social services of the Six received a higher proportion of the national income than those in Britain and that benefits were higher as a percentage of 'average wages'.<sup>48</sup> But the inference that the workers in the Common Market countries were better off was rejected by the Party on the grounds that since the employers paid a greater contribution on the continent, and the state much less, the workers were made to bear the major cost 'in so far as the employers recoup their share at the expense of the workers'. Exactly the same argument might have been made about the British method of funding – employers could recoup some of the tax they paid in a similar way by transferring it to prices paid by consumers – but the Left as a whole was blind to anything that might put the Common Market in a favourable light. The Communists thus ignored the point and talked as if they were persuaded that 'the strategy of the Tories' in applying for membership, was to copy the methods of finance of social services used among the Six and thus get the workers to pay more for them.<sup>49</sup> The reality was that the Party had originally opposed the Common Market as a supranational instrument of the Cold War; it continued to do so and for some of its analysts all else was really secondary to this fact.

Towards the end of the 1960s the Party was still labouring under some of the illusions expressed by Dutt and his co-thinkers in the early 1960s, but the central thrust of its analysis no longer depended upon them.<sup>50</sup> When the Labour Government declared its intention to apply for membership of the Six in November 1966 the CP reiterated its view that the 'Common Market perpetuates the economic and political division of Europe'.<sup>51</sup> But the bulk of its objections was concerned with bread-and-butter issues and the Party itself admitted that 'the basic ideas of the cold war are losing ground'. The Common Market was described as a customs union seeking to harmonise 'policies on equal pay, indirect taxation, social services, energy policy and transport policies'. Political union was described as an ambition which 'implies a minimum agreement on foreign policy'. Economically it was said to represent the interests of the monopolists. More prosaically, a regional policy would be impossible within its framework, its opponents confidently asserted. The common agricultural policy would damage Britain's interests; its balance of payments would deteriorate; it would have to give up profitable trade with the Commonwealth; it would have to adopt VAT; it would have to allow the free mobility of capital and give up any chance of adopting selective import controls; British industry would be 'plunged into the fiercest possible economic competition and our industries forced to modernise themselves if they are to survive' – a process that would benefit the big monopolies. Capital

flight would become a bigger problem. The democratic deficit of the Common Market also figured in the analysis, as did the loss of British sovereignty – especially in relation to planning and public ownership – but the key political and economic arguments were little different than those of other opponents of the project. As in other areas, a significant withering of ideology had taken place as the old Leninist assumptions and Stalinist perspectives were quietly and implicitly downgraded or abandoned, though the process was inevitably uneven precisely because the Party never acknowledged that such changes were taking place. The result was that some members of the Party continued to think as they had done in 1951, while others had moved on, stimulated by the growth of Marxist enquiry in bigger, more important, and more dynamic Communist Parties such as that of Italy, as well as the ideas that emanated from the burgeoning Marxist milieu outside the Party in Britain, in which a plan for the structural reform of the British economy was beginning to take shape.

## NOTES

1. Daniel Bell makes the point about the Keynesians in *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the 1950s*, Free Press, New York, revised edition 1962, p81.
2. 'Britain and World Economic Developments 1950', CP/CENT/ECON/48.
3. 'Capitalism's Economic Prospects', 1 May 1961, CP/CENT/ECON/5/2. This report contains a subtle analysis of the theory of the general crisis but its subtlety reveals, rather than conceals, the metaphysical character of the theory.
4. The self-criticism is contained in 'Post-war Economic Analyses and Forecasts: A Critical Re-examination', 6 August 1958. CP/CENT/ECON/1/4.
5. Gollan's remarks are quoted at the beginning of 'Capitalism's Economic Prospects'. See note 3.
6. J. Winternitz, *The Problem of Full Employment: A Marxist Analysis in Four Lessons*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1947, p31.
7. See the draft resolution of the 19th congress of the CPGB, 'The Deepened Crisis of Capitalism' in *World News and Views*, 30 November 1946 and Emile Burns's 'Economic Crisis', in the same journal on 21 December 1946.
8. Pollitt reported in *World News and Views*, 20 December 1947 on 'Britain's Crisis' and indicated that the USA was 'moving towards a slump'.
9. See his 'America's Re-armament Boom' in *World News and Views*, 28 July 1951. See also J. Eaton, 'The Threat of US Crisis', *Communist Review*, March 1950.
10. In 1952 the Economic Committee's report was entitled 'The Economic Crisis of 1952'; a US slump was forecast for 1954 in J. R. Campbell's 'Economic Developments and Prospects' published in *World News and Views*, 28 March 1953; increasing immiseration and more frequent crises was the theme of I. Trachtenberg's 'Reproduction of Capital and Crisis in Present-Day Capitalism', *Communist Review*, May 1953. This was trans-

lated from the Russian original and was based on Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (1952) which contained an analysis of the crisis of capitalist world markets; signs of an economic recession in the USA was one of the themes of the discussion statement for the twenty-third Party congress which appeared in the first issue of *World News and Views* in 1954; Pollitt referred to 'the first signs of a new crisis in the capitalist world' in his report to that congress in April 1954; in July of that year John Eaton wrote on 'Crisis and the USA' in *Marxist Quarterly*; 1955 was the best post-war year of the capitalist world so far but the Economic Committee predicted that the boom would not last beyond the first half of 1956 (published as 'Wages, Employment and the Struggle for Markets in 1956' in *World News and Views*, 24 March 1956); the Economic Report for 1956, published in *World News and Views*, 23 February 1957, continued to warn of the danger of recession in the USA.

11. For example, Manny Shinwell's 'You Can't Mix Capitalism and Socialism', *Tribune*, 9 March 1956; Ben Levy in *Tribune* 16 March 1956 attacking the 'New Thinkers'; the reviews of *Twentieth Century Socialism* and *The Future of Socialism* in *Tribune*, 29 June 1956 and 5 October 1956 respectively; the satirical board-game 'Mixed Economy', introduced in the Christmas issue of *Tribune* of 25 December 1960, which invited players to 'create an egalitarian society' while leaving capitalists in control of everything.
12. 'The Crisis: Marx versus Keynes, A Criticism of the Theories of Lord Keynes and the Policies Arising Therefrom', paper prepared for the Executive Committee, December 1949, CP/CENT/ECON/1/1. The next two paragraphs are based on this report.
13. 'American Big Business Threatens Britain', published by the London District Committee, July 1954, CP/CENT/ECON/1/3.
14. See for example, 'The Sterling Area and the Commonwealth Conference' and 'Britain and World Economic Development', both 1950, CP/CENT/ECON/1/2.
15. See 'Rearmament and Ruin: Britain's Economic Situation at the End of 1951', January 1952, CP/CENT/ECON/4/8 and 'The Pound and the Sterling Area', March 1958, CP/CENT/ECON/1/5.
16. See 'Economic Developments and Prospects for 1953', February 1953 and 'Britain's Struggle for Survival', 31 December 1953, CP/CENT/ECON/4/9.
17. 'The Standard of Living of British Workers', April 1951, CP/CENT/ECON/4/8.
18. 'Economic Committee Report Part Two', prepared for the Political Committee 22 March 1956, CP/CENT/ECON/1/4. The *Economist* of 31 December 1955 is quoted in this report as favouring 700,000 unemployed. The *Banker* (December 1955) and the British Employers' Confederation are said to prefer three per cent unemployment.
19. 'Wages, Employment and the Struggle for Markets in 1956'. CP/CENT/ECON/4/11; the same arguments occur in "Boom" - For Whom?: Analysis of the British Economy at the End of 1954', CP/CENT/ECON/4/10.
20. Editorial, *Economic Bulletin*, 1,2, April 1952.
21. H. Collins, 'The Cost of Living Index', *Economic Bulletin*, 3, 2, April 1954.

22. J. Eaton, 'Professor Galbraith's "The Affluent Society"', *Economic Bulletin*, 8, numbers 4 and 5, April 1959.
23. 'Economic Prospects for Britain 1960', CP/CENT/ECON/5/1.
24. 'Capitalism's Economic Prospects', 1 May 1961, CP/CENT/ECON/5/2. The authors of this report hazarded the guess that the main inflationary phase in the post-war period had come to an end. A hand-written note in the margin reads 'Dutt queries this'.
25. J. Eaton, 'The Economic Implications of Full Employment', *Economic Bulletin*, 5, 2, June 1956, pp9-11.
26. See V. L. Allen, *Militant Trade Unionism*, Merlin Press, London 1966.
27. Conference on 'The Economic Policy of Post-war Tory and Labour Governments', Godstone, Surrey, 9-10 October 1965, report by Tom Drinkwater, CP/CENT/ECON/6/10.
28. M. Dobb, 'Inflation and All-That', *Marxism Today*, March 1965, pp84-7.
29. See 'Attacking Britain's Economic Problems', conference held at Luton, 15-16 October 1966, CP/CENT/ECON/6/11.
30. Ibid, p5.
31. Warren came to the conclusion that the Party's strategy as contained in the *British Road to Socialism* was fundamentally flawed soon after the revised third edition appeared in October 1968. He doubted its three major cornerstones – the anti-monopoly alliance; the unity of the CP and a left-dominated Labour Party; and the parliamentary transition to socialism. He now believed that new forms of popular democratic struggle which prefigured the socialist vision were required if capitalism was to be overcome and a creative socialist alternative was to be found. See B. Warren, 'The Programme of the CPGB – A Critique', *New Left Review*, 63, September-October 1970, pp27-41.
32. The *Economic Bulletin*, January 1965, pp6-23, published a translation of Amedeo Grano's 'Inflation as an Economic Policy', which had originally appeared in *Critica Marxista* in May-June 1964. This piece raised the question of incomes policy in the context of 'structural reform' and 'social control of the process of accumulation'. The IWC was also influencing socialist economic analysis at this time with proposals for structural reform.
33. *Economic Bulletin*, new series, 8, April 1966, p25.
34. See note 24.
35. This was in a paper on 'State Monopoly Capitalism' – a central theme of the *British Road to Socialism*, which was in the process of being revised and updated in 1967. The third revised edition appeared in October 1968. See the report on this conference (16-17 September 1967, Hastings) in CP/CENT/ECON/6/13.
36. Editorial Comments, *Marxism Today*, September 1966, pp257-9.
37. Quoted in the editorial comment in *Marxism Today*, February 1967, p33.
38. See for example, John Strachey's arguments in 'The Powder and the Jam', *New Statesman*, 20 and 27 February 1954, p224 and p253. Here Strachey demands tighter foreign exchange controls, comprehensive import licences and state-determined export priorities.
39. 'Britain's Crisis and the Way Out', report of the Economic Sub-Committee, *Marxism Today*, May 1965, pp134-47.
40. Woodrow Wyatt, for example, speaking at the 1965 Labour Party annual conference at Blackpool argued that 'if we dropped our unfortunate East

of Suez policy we could save, in foreign exchange, on bases overseas, more than the total of our current balance of payments deficit ... We might even be able to tell the Americans what we really think about Vietnam. We do not need troops in Aden and Singapore in order to conduct trade; that is a relic of a nostalgic and perilous past. All we collect with troops and bases overseas is wars that we cannot stop and revolutions that we cannot put down'. *Labour Party Annual Conference Report: Blackpool 27 September-1 October 1965*, Labour Party, London 1965, p164.

41. 'Common Sense About the Common Market', 1957, CP/CENT/ECON/1/4. The rest of the paragraph is based on this report of the Economic Committee's.
42. *Ibid*, p13.
43. 'Annual Economic Report' 1962, p17, CP/CENT/ECON/5/4.
44. 'Precis of Opening Statement by R. P. Dutt and Discussion of IAC on the Common Market', 3 July 1962, CP/CENT/INT/66/01.
45. E. M. Winterton, 'Classes and Parties Today', *Labour Monthly*, August 1962.
46. Pat Devine made these points at the Luton conference on 'Britain's Economic Problems'. See note 24.
47. Report on 'Problems of Contemporary Capitalism', conference organised by *World Marxist Review* and the Soviet Academy of Sciences, Moscow 24 August to 3 September 1962, CP/CENT/ECON/6/2.
48. 'Social services and the Common Market', 4 December 1961, pp1-16, CP/CENT/STAT/1/10.
49. K. Hood, 'The Tory Attack on the Social Services', *Marxism Today*, April 1961.
50. 'The Common Market - Some Facts and Arguments', 3 March 1967, CP/CENT/INT/68. The Party was still worried about the American connection, however, and Tom Drinkwater was said to be preparing an article for *Comment* asking if the Common Market would make Britain independent of the USA.
51. Press statement, 'The Common Market', 13 November 1966, CP/CENT/STAT/2/3.

## 6. Prisoners of Democracy: The British Road to Socialism

The Executive adopted a new programme on 13 January 1951 which it called the *British Road to Socialism*. It was declared 'an outstanding event in the history of [the] Party' and in many ways it was. Over 140,000 copies of the pamphlet were sold in the first few weeks of publication. Yet the new programme – which committed the Party to a peaceful, parliamentary strategy – was adopted without serious involvement by, or discussion among, the membership. An ideological departure on this scale was under any circumstances unthinkable without Russian approval and for many years informed observers supposed that Stalin had had a direct hand in producing it. Only after the dissolution of the Party were these suspicions confirmed by George Matthews, former assistant General Secretary. Of course Party leaders could point, with truth, to the steps already taken by Pollitt to indicate that a British road to socialism would be different from Russia's. His 1947 book *Looking Ahead* envisaged no role for the dictatorship of the proletariat in Britain and suggested that a peaceful transition to socialism was feasible. But since these ideological departures themselves originated without Party debate it was difficult to believe they were unconnected to the current Soviet reorientation of western Communism in support of the continuation of good relations with the USA and Great Britain. From the outset the new programme was thus greeted with satire and suspicion in the mainstream press. Its shocking pink cover was hailed as a 'stroke of genius-cum-impudence' for, in keeping with the programme's reformist content, the hammer and sickle, in the words of the *News Chronicle*, had become the 'hammer and cyclamen'. Most observers also commented on the astonishing contention that it was nothing more than a 'slanderous misrepresentation' of Communist policy to 'accuse the Communist Party of aiming to introduce Soviet Power in Britain and abolish Parliament'.<sup>1</sup> The Party's previous programme, adopted in 1935, had been called *For Soviet Britain* and it had always been supposed that this was precisely what the Party had been created to achieve. It was agreed that the Communists were shameless, but the purpose of the new course was the subject of some disagreement. The revisions of Communist doctrine which everyone noticed were intended to court favour with 'the

Labour Party's lunatic fringe' according to the *Economist*. But others, some of them representing this 'lunatic fringe', remembered how easily the Communists had forsaken democracy in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and took the opportunity to remind their readers of 'the facility with which Communists make overnight changes of tactics'. The trick would not work again.

Though the *British Road* was undoubtedly an 'attempt to make the Party appear not so red after all', in the word of the renegade Douglas Hyde, it was not so obvious why it was needed in 1951 when the Party rejoiced in a phase of militant rhetoric and sectarianism that showed no signs of abating. The *News Chronicle* was not alone in observing that 'nearly forty years of obedience to a foreign power' would 'not be forgotten in a night', but the Communists were making no secret of their continuing obeisance to the Soviet Union, which was depicted in Party propaganda as the only peace-loving state among the victors of the Second World War. Much of the new programme was concerned to warn against the 'war bloc' of British and American imperialisms which had been formed against the socialist and colonial peoples. Imperialist America dictated the policies of the countries of Western Europe; it threatened China, proposed to rearm West Germany and Japan, and was currently at war in Korea; it had war bases all over the world and aimed at 'the forcible suppression of colonial liberation movements'; it was 'openly preparing for a third world war'. From such gloomy material as this the programme nevertheless contrived to reach the optimistic conclusion that 'a third world war [was] neither necessary nor inevitable'.

A similar turn of logic was required to reach its main conclusion that a peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism was possible in Britain. The world imagined by the *British Road* was that of Victory Gin and Airstrip One – not all that dissimilar to 1940s Britain but a long way removed from the image of the affluent society broadcast by opinion leaders in the later 1950s. 'Two world wars, poverty, malnutrition, slumps and mass unemployment have been the lot of the common people', began the second paragraph. 'But the millionaires of Britain', it continued, 'the big industrialists and the great monopolists have made their fortunes out of the people's labour'. The leaderships of both main political parties connived in this lugubrious situation, according to the Communists, just as they maintained the subjugation of exploited peoples abroad and supported the foreign policy of alliance with predatory American capitalism. Britain had lost its national independence in the process and had become a target for nuclear annihilation because of the elite's 'betrayal'. Britain had become 'an American base' under an 'American army of occupation'. If there was hope it lay with the proles, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The programme dismissed 'as a lie, the charge that Communism [was] to be imposed by aggression and conquest' and asserted 'that social transformation can only come through internal

changes in accordance with the actual conditions in each country'. National independence was the indispensable precondition for Britain's recovery and advance. The Party rejected 'all theories which declare[d] national sovereignty to be out-of-date' (and insisted that 'the enforced partition of Ireland and the maintenance of British troops in Northern Ireland' had to be ended, while the Scots and Welsh would determine how their own national claims would be settled). 'Above all, the Communist Party would solve the question of the relations of Britain with the countries of the British Empire'. And here another 'lie' was exposed; namely, that the Communists would destroy the British Empire by subversion. On the contrary, once the colonial peoples achieved their independence 'a new, close, voluntary and fraternal association' of Britain and her former colonies would be established 'to promote mutually beneficial economic exchange and co-operation'.

This innovation was deleted from the third (1958) edition of the programme after Stalin, its inspiration, was safely out of the way, but it wasn't much more than a curiosity in the first place. The main thrust of the new thinking was that the British working class – two-thirds of the population – would form an alliance with the bulk of the white collar workforce and, despite the concentration of power 'in the hands of the tiny section of the rich property-owners', would use parliament to introduce socialism and abolish capitalism. This broad popular alliance could be built 'only on the basis of a united working class as its decisive leading force' – a phrase that was once code for the Communist Party itself. But it was now acknowledged that:

to bring about decisive change in Britain, the millions of workers in the trade unions, co-operatives and individual members' sections of the Labour Party w[ould] have to use their political and industrial strength to make it impossible for either the right-wing Labour leaders or the Tories to carry on their present pernicious policy.

Unity thus meant unity of the Communist Party and the Labour Party – minus the right-wing leaders who held the latter back. It is clear from numerous statements made privately as well as publicly that the Party leaders recognised that a major adjustment was required to steer the membership in the required direction and away from the sectarianism that had taken a grip in some quarters since 1948.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, declared the programme:

the Communist Party calls upon all working people to unite and fight now for peace and to protect and improve their standards and living conditions; to win increased wages; to combat high prices, taxation and rents; to defend their trade union and democratic rights; and in this daily struggle to strengthen and extend the unity, organisation, solidarity, confidence and political consciousness of all sections of the workers.

The struggle for wages, peace, and social progress was thus the way forward, coupled with anything that would promote the Communist agenda inside the Labour Party, so that eventually 'a real People's Democracy' could be built in Britain. What such a People's Democracy would look like remained vague, though it was clear that 'socialist nationalisation' would bring most of the economy under state control. 'The whole legislative and executive machinery of the country' was to be 'made continuously responsive to the democratic will of the people' but it took a second edition before the need for a plurality of political parties was acknowledged as key for democracy. The assumed unity of 'the people' rendered any careful analysis of socialist political institutions redundant, just as it had been for Lenin in *State and Revolution*.

In 1954 John Gollan, soon to succeed Harry Pollitt as leader of the Party, published the most exhaustive account of the British political system which had yet appeared from a leading Communist.<sup>3</sup> It was in many ways recognisably Leninist. It asserted that 'the entire constitutional and state apparatus' remained firmly in the hands of 'the capitalist trusts' no matter which government was in office. As Lenin had pointed out in *Imperialism* in 1916, the 'present constitutional position', Gollan observed, testified to the strengthening of the state machine and the unprecedented growth of its bureaucratic and military apparatus. The executive dominated Parliament and concerned itself with 'the continually widening scope of state activity'. But the real power was concentrated in the great trusts: 'the state is their state, the judges, the higher civil servants, the diplomats, the generals, and the police chiefs are drawn from their social circles, impregnated with their ideology'. Gollan showed how members of the cabinet, leaders of the political parties, members of both Houses of Parliament, together with members of the Royal Household, the directors of the mass media and the other agencies of mass propaganda such as film and advertising, as well as innumerable 'public' bodies and lobbying organisations, were often direct representatives of these trusts. But even when they were not direct representatives he showed how a common class background, similar educational and family experience, common material self-interests, assumptions and ideological outlook, bound the members of the ruling class together. Another sign of this dense network of overlapping interests was the way individual members of the ruling class moved from one position in the power structure to another, whether military, bureaucratic, economic or political. Gollan's reasoning in some ways anticipated the influential academic works on the state written by C. Wright Mills and Ralph Milliband and his analysis was probably the best post-war Marxist study of the British state until Milliband's *The State in Capitalist Society* appeared in 1969.

Gollan observed that whether we looked at the great mass of delegated legislation concerned with domestic policy or the formulation and conduct of foreign policy, Parliament exercised little or no real control over what was done in its name. He also argued that the political system

had been 'devised and fashioned by the British ruling class to prevent social change'. Some of its institutions were designed to promote class collaboration, such as the monarchy. An 'orgy of royalty worship' had recently attended the death of King George VI (February 1952) and the coronation of his daughter, Elizabeth II, in June 1953. As 'the language of editorials, articles and speeches reached an extravagant hysterical pitch' by the time of Coronation Day, the Labour Party leaders disgusted the Communists with their expressions of 'uncritical adulation' designed, as it seemed to them, to stress (an utterly bogus) underlying unity of the country. A People's Democracy required a complete break with this state by 'giving unrestricted power to the people'. Yet every past step to democracy in Britain had been long drawn out and fiercely resisted. Institutions such as the Lords, Monarchy and Conservative Party were 'anti-democratic', others such as the electoral system and Parliamentary Labour Party scarcely less so. Nevertheless, according to Gollan, the conservative forces were constantly questioning the utility and desirability of such democratic forms as there were – whether through the cantankerous outpourings of writers such as Max Beloff or in those of politicians such as L. S. Amery and the Tory MP Craik Henderson, author of the *Dangers of a Supreme Parliament* (Lord Hailsham termed it an 'elective dictatorship' twenty years later) or establishment journals such as *The Times*.<sup>4</sup> Of course, Gollan insisted, what they were all really worried about was the 'danger of a workers' militant majority'. This was a democratic outcome that they would not tolerate. Indeed, 'the bitter, anti-democratic viewpoint of the British ruling class had recently been seen in all its nakedness in the suspension of the Constitution in British Guiana', when the first election based on adult suffrage gave Cheddi Jagan's People's Progressive Party an absolute majority in the Lower House in April 1953. The British army simply moved in and put a stop to radical reform before it could begin. In Britain itself the ruling class was 'engaged in a consistent ideological campaign to undermine and destroy the hitherto accepted basis of majority rule', according to Gollan, and brute force would be used at home too when the need arose.

The Labour Party was one of the main reasons why political violence had not been needed more often since 1900. At least that could be inferred from Gollan's logic. It functioned 'as the second party of capitalism', though the membership periodically rebelled against this role. It had been caught 'in the British constitutional net' because 'social democratic theory' regarding the supposed neutrality of the state had 'poisoned the minds and outlook of important sections of the working class'. Overcoming the right-wing leadership of the Labour Party and the trade unions was the most important objective of the Communists as we shall see in the next chapter. For Gollan 'capitalism in crisis' was 'rotten-ripe for social change'. The ruling class was drawing its own conclusions, the working class was required to do the same but was held back by its own leaders. The Communists' perception of Britain's true

condition was informed by Lenin's account of the 'imperialist epoch', entailing the growth of state monopoly capitalism, the growing bureaucratisation and militarisation of the political economy and the hollowing out of civil liberties and democracy. 'Militarism is the outstanding feature of the British state today', asserted Gollan in 1954. It was manifest in 'support for the US war alliance and NATO', 'support of American aggression in Korea', 'brutal colonial wars in Malaya and Kenya', 'the state of half-war in Egypt and the determination to hang on to a British Empire'. This 'Warfare State' maintained an unprecedented overseas armed force for 'peacetime', scattered across the world from West Germany to Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Egypt, Kenya and British Guiana. It necessitated two years conscription – the longest military service in Western Europe – followed by a further three and a half years in the reserves and five more years on an emergency register. It strengthened Toryism at home and involved 'fascist methods' abroad such as the 'collective punishment' meted out to villagers in Malaya and the 'horrors' perpetrated in Kenya, where prizes had been awarded in competitions between army units for the highest kill.

The Communists foresaw the doom of British imperialism but predicted that the attempt to keep it afloat would involve a 'feverish' export drive, impossible targets and 'an all-out offensive against working class living standards at home'. The gloominess of this outlook cannot be exaggerated; the Communist press kept up a 'declinist' narrative on the British economy throughout the period covered by this book. Britain's military burden was 'crippling', the economy – 'in chronic crisis' – was subjected to an already 'unbearable strain' as its American, German and Japanese competitors closed in around it in the mid-50s. The militarised state had also sprouted numerous economic institutions and forms of direct economic control serving 'the monopolists', whose integration with the state machine called for the parallel incorporation of the 'trade union bureaucracy' and the suppression of countervailing forces. But 'the struggle for peace, national independence and social advance' would eventually create the 'broad people's alliance' required to 'break the power of the millionaire monopolists and other big capitalists'. A 'People's Government' would use this alliance to root out all the representatives of the former ruling class from the state machine and break the economic power of the 'big exploiters' and any sources of 'capitalist resistance'. Gollan invoked the experience of eastern Europe to show how this might be achieved, promising 'continuous mass movement' of the people and the elevation into the state machinery of 'loyal advocates' of the people's power as the twin bases of the enduring people's democracy to come. It was not an attractive model for most people familiar with the recent history of Eastern Europe.

The revised third edition of the *British Road to Socialism* – commissioned in 1956 but not published until February 1958 – was faithful to these perspectives. The enemy was identified as 'the 500 great monopo-

lies' and their subsidiaries, and these would be nationalised. Compensation would take the form of an annual annuity payable during the lifetime of former owners to a maximum amount equal to the average wage – tantamount to a personal catastrophe for many of them, we may be sure, if the Communists had ever had their way. Smaller enterprises would be 'encouraged' to work closely with the national plan under private ownership, though the programme acknowledged that 'socialism eventually means the complete elimination of production for private profit'.<sup>5</sup> It also admitted that:

in order to carry out these economic measures, a socialist state must be built up to replace the existing capitalist state, and to ensure that the decisions of Parliament are carried into effect by men and women loyal to the aims of socialism.

A wholesale clear-out was thus required and the passage of various constitutional reforms – such as those which Gollan had already outlined in 1954 – but nothing like the direct soviet democracy championed by Lenin. The programme's vision was, however, now of a pluralist political system geared to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. This calculus focused on harnessing science and technology to the cause of economic growth, rising living standards, more individual leisure and longer retirement. Centralised planning would ensure that such advances as atomic power, automation, and large-scale farming were used to achieve these ends. The programme had little to say about the parliamentary strategy itself and little about politics as an arena and process of conflict resolution and consensus building. The socialist consensus of the future was assumed to be certain and fixed. The struggle to get there still involved building an alliance between the working class (two-thirds of the population) and 'the great majority of clerical and professional workers, technicians, scientists, working farmers, shopkeepers, self-employed and small business men'. These people were also 'victims' of Tory big business, suffering from 'high prices and rents and heavy taxation'; they also had to make do with inadequate 'education, health and housing services'; they also paid the cost of 'aggressive imperialist policies and colonial wars' and feared the threat of nuclear war.

The programme thus forced the Communists to think about a growing political constituency outside of the working class. It also accustomed the Party to think in terms of a national road to socialism adapted to British conditions and to take general elections seriously. References to 'People's Democracy' were dropped from the programme's third edition, which now also contained an explicit commitment to party pluralism 'under' socialism. A document which never bore much relation to the Party's real prospects was in all these ways important in prompting and legitimising further steps away from the Party's Leninist origins.

## THE ELECTORAL RECORD

The real electoral dramas of the Communist Party had already taken place before any ink was wasted elaborating strategy and tactics. The high point had occurred in the round of elections of 1945-6, prompting the creation of a Local Government and Parliamentary Department sub-committee reporting to the Executive. Two MPs – Willie Gallacher (West Fife) and Phil Piratin (Mile End) – and 215 councillors had been elected – up from one MP and 81 councillors in the last relevant rounds of elections. The Party now persuaded itself that it could become an electoral force as other Communist Parties already had done on the continent. After all, its aggregate general election vote in 1945 – 102,780 – represented 31 per cent of the Labour vote in the contested constituencies and it had succeeded in electing 25 per cent of its 840 candidates for local government. There were, additionally, obvious strongholds to be exploited in the future. In Wales, for example, 21 Communist councillors were returned, amassing 76,266 votes between them as against 118,698 Labour votes in the same wards; in the county council elections of the spring of 1946, 20 Communist candidates in Wales averaged 57 per cent of the Labour vote in the wards contested. Pollitt almost won the Parliamentary seat for Rhondda East with 15,761 votes (45 per cent of the poll), other Communist candidates polled over 10,000 votes in Hornsey (21 per cent), nearly 6,000 in Greenock (17.1 per cent), over 4,000 in Sheffield Brightside (13 per cent). But in the general election of 1950 all the hopes generated by these statistics were dashed. The Party stood 100 candidates in the general election and 97 lost their deposits for failing to secure one-eighth of the poll; the aggregate Communist vote was less than that of the 21 Party candidates in 1945; both Communist MPs were defeated and the Party's showing in local elections reflected the adverse trend.<sup>6</sup> The Local Government and Parliamentary sub-committee was dissolved in 1948, its work supposedly absorbed by the Organisation Department.

Chastened by these results, the Party fielded just 10 candidates in the general election of 1951. This was its first general election, of course, since the adoption of a specifically parliamentary road to socialism and it is significant that it began this venture in retreat. All ten candidates finished in third and last place except J. R. Campbell who, contesting Churchill's constituency of Woodford, obtained 871 votes and thus left last place to an independent candidate who polled just 81.<sup>7</sup> The largest number of votes was obtained by William Lauchlan contesting Gallacher's former seat of West Fife, where 4,728 had voted Communist. But even this compared badly to the 9,301 votes Gallacher had received in 1950, itself a long way down from the 17,630 obtained in 1945. Similarly Idris Cox polled only 2,948 votes in Rhondda East, compared to the 4,463 Harry Pollitt received a year earlier, but then that had been another disaster compared to the 15,761 votes of 1945. In the light of these results the decision to withdraw the candidatures of Dutt (Hampstead), Bill Alexander (Northfield), Alan Thomas (Llanelly) and Finlay Hart (Greenock) was

not taken by the Labour Party as the conciliatory gesture that it was intended to be. The Communists' talk of unity of the labour movement to prevent a Tory victory could be safely ignored, just as the electorate had seemingly ignored the Party's main campaign issues in the fields of foreign policy (the Atlantic Pact, Japanese and German rearmament, Malaya, Korea, the threat of force against Iran, the danger of a third world war, the need for a Five-Power Peace Pact) and domestic reform (more nationalisation and social reform, action to halt the rising cost of living). The only real comfort from these results came from the Gorbals, where Peter Kerrigan increased his vote to 2,553 and where the focus on the local problem of bad housing was thought to have contributed to his relative success. Not only was the Labour Government's record poor on this issue, but the Scottish Communists had sent a deputation on housing to the Secretary of State for Scotland in 1945 securing an agreement that half a million homes would be built in ten years.<sup>8</sup> In the event 100,000 had been constructed in six years and there were broken promises to highlight. The Communist candidates in Scotland were also thought to have earned local credibility by leading campaigns to prevent evictions in the constituencies of West Fife, Dundee West (where the Labour incumbent was John Strachey), Dunbartonshire East and Glasgow Gorbals.

Surely, then, local politics was the way forward as it had been for the Labour Party in its first fifty years? Communist strongholds at a local level already existed in Scotland and Wales in particular. Parts of the Rhondda valley, the Vale of Leven, and the East End of London had emerged as pockets of Communist strength before the war. In these places it had proved possible to conclude electoral pacts and working alliances with local Labour parties. Building on such areas of strength might have been possible, or so the Party could reasonably have calculated, if local Communists gave assiduous attention to local issues. Municipalities were expanding centres of expenditure with big responsibilities in education, housing, and other forms of collective consumption. But the Party came up with few imaginative ideas and no new overall conception of local politics beyond practical work conscientiously carried out by Communist councillors and promises to do better than Labour in local spending on health centres, schools, hospitals, and housing. In certain localities it undoubtedly engaged in direct action. Frank Watters, for example, recalled that 'the Party played a leading role in battles over rents' in many pit villages on the Yorkshire coalfield in the 1950s. It was also 'very concerned with broad environmental issues' in these areas and was prepared to work with the Church of England in those communities where local clerics tried to get involved with the working class in the early 1960s.<sup>9</sup> The Party already had a long history of involvement in struggles over housing in the places where it was strong, but these centres were in decline in the 1950s. When a revival of interest in radical local politics took place it was the Liberal Party and the Young Liberals in particular which were more able to take the limelight as 'pioneers' of 'community

politics' in the late 1960s. Communists had been for the most part simply more militant champions of greater provision in the traditional areas of social democratic spending than their Labour counterparts and they had been fighting a losing battle on this front throughout the period. The local vote in the May 1951 elections (220 candidates shared 37,433 votes) had already shown 'a serious decline' precisely in the local strongholds of the Rhondda and Glasgow. In 1952 the Party contested only 165 wards and divisions for the borough and district councils and a mere 15 in the county elections. The overall performance was an improvement on 1951, with a total of 10,859 county votes and 50,543 gained in the boroughs and districts. But only 16 Communist councillors were elected – the best results being in Clydebank, Cwmbran and Leiston in Suffolk, where Paxton Chadwick was beginning to make an enduring mark on local politics. In 1953 the Party lost every seat it had on the London metropolitan borough councils, including six in Stepney, an erstwhile stronghold. It also failed to gain a seat anywhere else in the country and only held on to one of six seats contested in the Rhondda.<sup>10</sup> Though four of the lost seats were recaptured in Stepney in 1956, the Party's 321 candidates failed to win in any of the 401 boroughs of England and Wales.

The Party's inability to establish a critical mass of elected representatives in any local authority is perhaps one of the obvious reasons why it failed to develop imaginative and innovative interventions in local politics. It hung on with elected representatives in places like Whitburn in Scotland, Clydebank, Greenock and the Rhondda but even the stalwarts and local champions in these areas suffered in 1957 – in the shadow of Hungary – including Annie Powell who was first elected to the Rhondda Borough Council in 1955 after 13 previous attempts (and completed her term as mayor of Rhondda 25 years later in 1980). The industrial workers, who were not supposed to be interested in far away places like Hungary, had spoken. Though the election had been a good one for Labour, the usually beneficent trend did not work for the Communists on this occasion. Only five old faithfus – Cowdenbeath, Cleveden, Aberdare, Leiston and Trowbridge – seemed unaffected by the traumas of the previous year. In all, 109 Communists mustered just 23,102 votes – the first time ever that the Party vote was less than the Party membership.<sup>11</sup> East End Jewish Communism never recovered from the shocks of 1956.<sup>12</sup> But it was already in decline because of the resurgence of Zionism, the conflict between Israel and the Soviet Union, and the evidence of anti-semitism in the Soviet Union after 1948. No doubt secular trends weakened it too, as they seem to have done in the other pockets of Communist strength, where there was evidence of a failure to interest the young and to keep the existing membership active. The Party recognised the problem of declining Jewish support as early as May 1949 and correctly identified some of its causes.<sup>13</sup> But its support for the Soviet Union, denial of Soviet anti-semitism, and depiction of Israel as a tool and 'semi-colony' of US imperialism reinforced the case for regarding it with

suspicion. In the aftermath of Second World War, Communist propaganda depicting the scale of US economic aid to Israel was not likely to work in the Party's cause.<sup>14</sup>

In 1958 the Communists fought four seats on the London County Council and took only 4,772 of the 2,106,489 votes cast, winning no seats. In the England and Wales municipal boroughs the Party lost the only seat it had on an English borough council when its candidate failed to get re-elected at Rowley Regis in Staffordshire. Nevertheless with 21 councillors all told, after this set of elections, the Party had a marginally better position in local government than its position after the last relevant round (1955) when it possessed just 15. Even so 245 Communists – 50 of them miners (of whom 8 were successful) – had stood in the elections, collecting a grand total of 72,000 votes. The Party now had eleven seats in Scotland, six in Wales, and four in England (Thorne, Sevenoaks, Chesterfield, and Houghton-le-Spring). In 1959 the main story of note was the expulsion from the Labour Party of seven councillors representing the St. Pancras borough in London, including the leader of the council John Lawrence.<sup>15</sup> All subsequently joined the Communist Party but when Lawrence stood as a Communist candidate in the 1959 local elections he failed to win his old seat. The new decade saw the declining trend continue. In 1962 – despite fielding 489 candidates, the largest number for years – only seven of the Party's candidates were successful in the old faithful wards of Stepney (3), Rhondda and Trowbridge. In the election of 1964, in the context of an electoral swing to Labour, the Party fielded 900 candidates who shared 250,000 votes. Its local representation now stood at 24 councillors – two county councillors, four borough councillors, five urban district councillors, five rural district, three Scottish burgh and five Scottish county councillors. In January 1966 it set up an electoral department and nominated 398 candidates to fight the spring elections; only three were successful and its aggregate vote fell to 61,000. In 1967 all county and borough elections and most district and parish contests saw a field of 590 Communists obtain 28 successes. All told the Party now had 37 councillors.<sup>16</sup>

Having failed to gain even a toehold in local government, the Party had no real chance in national politics. In 1955 15 of its 17 parliamentary candidates finished in last position. William Lauchlan obtained 5,389 votes in West Fife and Annie Powell came second in East Rhondda with 4,544 votes, ahead of the Conservative candidate. The only other performances of note were Solly Kaye's third position in Stepney, ahead of the Liberal, with 2,888 votes and Peter Kerrigan's 2,491 votes in the Gorbals. Once again the Party had campaigned on foreign policy issues such as the need for summit talks, defence cuts, the abolition of the H-bomb, and the possibility of avoiding German rearmament by the creation of a united Germany tied to a collective European peace pact. On domestic matters it demanded price controls, more new houses, better pensions, the nationalisation of engineering, shipbuilding, chemicals and other basic

industries, as well as the big banks and insurance companies and the land of the large landowners.<sup>17</sup> The Conservatives were depicted as the 'war party' and intent on pursuing measures to cut working-class living standards. The Party's hatred for the Conservatives was at all times impressive in the 1950s and 1960s and there was much talk about the need for campaigns to get them out of office, as if this could be done by extra-parliamentary action – especially in the early 1950s. But there was no affection for the Labour leadership either, whose policies were blamed for the much decreased Labour vote of 1955 and any further attrition thereafter, whether of turnout or Labour's share of the poll. By 1959 many people, including the Labour leadership, were giving serious attention to the argument that Labour could not get re-elected as long as it was associated with a declining class, decaying industries, and old centres of urban dereliction. The Party's dismal performance in general elections could only serve as a footnote to this argument. Annie Powell polled 36 votes more than last time but this could only underline the fact that the picture in 1959 was at best one of stagnation for the 19 Communist candidates, most of whom were standing again in seats that had been targeted years before. Again the Party had emphasised its peace credentials – demanding defence cuts and disarmament and warning of the dangers to Britain of the US military bases. It crowed about the Soviet space triumphs and complained about the condition of British housing. But it was a rare thing to attract more than 3 per cent of the poll even when the candidate was well known locally.

The Party leadership's taste for the electoral struggle was, however, growing. It may be that fighting general elections had not really been taken that seriously at the beginning – John Gollan suggested as much in 1966. Certainly the origins of the 1951 programme give reason to doubt whether there had been any real change of heart on this matter when the change was first made. Elections had only been subordinate elements in the Party's struggle, opportunities for propaganda and not much more. But the subsequent revisions to the *British Road to Socialism* provided opportunities for the organisation to think about its electoral commitments in the context of Britain's changing social structure and the Party's search for alliances. Each time the Party programme became a more sophisticated and a more genuine product of the Party's thinking than the one approved by Stalin. Parliamentary reformism irritated some Party members because it exposed the organisation's political weaknesses in ways which the industrial struggle served to conceal. But the critics did not propose a revolutionary alternative. Everyone knew that this was a non-starter in the post-war period. John Gollan probably spoke for nearly all Communists when he described the coming 1964 contest as 'a momentous, decisive election'.<sup>18</sup> He argued that Britain was at the cross-roads and implied that the general election result would help to determine which way it would go. He also talked of the ways in which the Tories had not modernised, but rather had paralysed Britain. He went on to

complain that: 'Our economy is stagnant, our rate of growth the lowest in capitalist Europe'.

The tone here was clearly reformist. But it coexisted with the conviction that the 'great issue' remained 'the 200 great monopolies' and that Labour's failure to mention them in its manifesto *The New Britain* rendered all its talk of purposive planning 'mere words in the wind'. Thus alongside complaints that British capitalism was relatively poor in performance stood maximalist rhetoric calling for an 'end to monopoly domination' and the need for a 'social revolution' as a prerequisite for the scientific revolution demanded by Labour. The Communist programme remained far more radical than anything contemplated by the Labour Party, of course, but bore a family resemblance to the Wilsonian ideal of material progress driven by scientific and technological change. The main difference was that in the Communist view the changes desired by both parties necessitated measures such as the democratisation of education – abolition of the public schools, abolition of selection and a massive expansion of higher education; a major extension of public ownership; an enormous expansion of public spending on health, housing and social services; and a fundamental reappraisal of British foreign policy involving withdrawal from NATO and abandonment of the East of Suez policy, immediate nuclear disarmament and an end to the US military bases in Britain. In its essentials the Communist programme was not much different from the alternative economic strategy adopted by the Labour left ten years later.

The Communist impact in the 1964 campaign was of course negligible – a fact which the Party partly attributed to its complete exclusion from political broadcasting (a matter on which it campaigned vigorously). But no one was in any doubt that the results were too bad to have just one cause:

#### 1964 General Election: Communist Candidates and Results

Candidate	Seat	Votes	% of the poll
J. Tudor Hart	Aberavon	1260	2.7
G. Self	Small Heath	926	3.2
Harry Bourne	Coventry East	1138	1.0
Kevin Halpin	Dagenham	1070	2.1
Jimmy Reid	Dunbartonshire E.	1771	2.0
Dave Bowman	Dundee West	1228	2.4
W. Lauchlan	Fife West	3273	7.4
Mrs. M. Hunter	Gorbals	1339	5.9
Gordon McLennan	Govan	1378	4.4
N. McLennan	Springburn	950	3.6
W. Carr	Goole	1165	2.8
F. Stanley	Hayes	873	2.5

Bert Ramelson	Leeds South	928	2.6
T. Cassin	Liverpool Scotland	725	2.7
R.E. Hitchon	Llanelli	1061	2.1
Tony Chater	Luton	567	1.2
Eddie Marsden	Openshaw	1947	5.1
Sid French	Mitcham	657	1.2
J.J. David	Neath	2432	6.0
T. Welch	Newcastle Central	532	1.8
John Peck	Nottingham North	1579	3.0
E. Jones	Pontypool	1329	3.5
Annie Powell	Rhondda East	3385	11.5 (second in poll)
Howard Hill	Brightside	1356	3.5
I. Gradwell	Swindon	944	2.1
Mick Weaver	Wigan	988	2.4
L. Burt	Willesden West	1130	3.0
Mrs I. Swan	West Lothian	610	1.2
C.M. Grieve	Kinross	127	0.5
Mrs. G. Easton	Battersea North	471	2.0
Max Morris	Hornsey	1258	2.6
J. F. Moss	Islington SW	1377	5.1
J. Nicholson	St. Pancras North	1140	3.4
J. Bent	Southwark	1599	3.4
Solly Kaye	Stepney	2454	7.9

Among the 35 candidates were notable industrial militants such as Jimmy Reid, Mick Weaver and Kevin Halpin who were regarded with respect and even affection at their places of work; and those, like John Peck, with a high local profile in the communities where they lived. But it made no difference. Even in Stepney and Rhondda East the Party commanded less than one-eighth of the poll. Nowhere did it look like winning or even significantly improving its performance in the future.

The leadership was not resigned to these facts. The Labour victory was said to be 'of the greatest possible political significance' and evidence of 'the crisis in British imperialism'.<sup>19</sup> But the Labour vote was practically the same as in 1959 – 44.1 per cent – and evidence of its failure to inspire the voters. What was need was 'decisive action against the monopolists'. Instead business was issued with assurances, an incomes policy was lined up for implementation, and finance and defence policy suggested continuity with the defeated Tories. Within weeks of the election the Communists made clear their complete opposition to wage restraint and any industrial modernisation which entailed redundancies and increased exploitation. As always, they identified foreign policy as a particular cause for concern. From all of this came the need for an active, campaigning left wing in the unions, the peace movement, the constituencies and elsewhere. As for their own performance in the election, according to Gollan, 'no one [was] expecting a really big advance'.<sup>20</sup> There had been no TV

time, the canvassing had 'left a lot to be desired' – touching no more than 30 per cent of the electorate in the 35 constituencies – and the Party had been handicapped by the 'wasted vote' argument. The results in West Fife and Rhondda 'caused the most serious concern' because in both areas 'the political work and organisation of the Party for several years ha[d] not been what it should be'. According to Gollan, the Communists were 'not reaching out to young people, our support tends to be among the older age groups ... our main support has come from the miners and the industry has contracted'. But the national picture did not depend on these particularities.

Here, on the bigger stage, there was 'the problem of presenting a radical policy to an electorate large sections of which enjoy improving living standards'. But this was a potentially heretical thought one could not dwell on. The major weakness was instead identified as the failure to make a national impact, a 'problem ... bound up with our present size and stage of development'. There could be no major national impact on the strength of just 35 contests. 'Yet the fact remains that [these] contests ... stretched our resources'. The only way to make a bigger impact in the future was to extend the number of contests but this ... 'in turn depends on our growth in the factories and localities, the development of the mass work of our branches, the further extension of our municipal contests, the extension of the *Daily Worker* and literature sales'. 'Even then we will be seeking to fight as part of the Labour movement as a whole', Gollan added. This seemed to suggest that a prior growth of the Party was required before its electoral work could be extended. Gollan dismissed the argument that the Party should cut down on its contests. Such a policy would exclude most members from electoral work and give up the aim of creating a mass party. Instead he proposed more scientific electioneering, including a better selection of issues, more effective use of the national press, a larger staff at the Centre, the use of full-time researchers during election campaigns, continuity of agents, a permanent film-making committee, experimentation with the presentation of policies, better campaigning literature, and the creation of an electoral department of the Party. He was in effect already committing the Party to an extension of its electoral work before any growth in its size had occurred. Sure enough, when the Government announced a general election for 31 March 1966 the Communists found 49 candidates in short time and 57 by election day.

On this occasion the Party's election manifesto *New Britain – People's Britain* – was sold as a sixpenny pamphlet, while 600,000 copies of a smaller popular version were distributed free. The Communists were allocated five minutes airtime on television and an equal amount on radio, prompting Gollan and Reuben Falber, the national election agent, to begin the campaign with a visit to the Chief Whip's Office and the House of Commons to register their complaints. Any voters who managed to see or hear Communist electoral publicity would have

registered the fact that it consisted of a very long wish-list based on the conviction that 'there are no technical limits today to the improvements we can bring about with the help of science and technology if they are properly used'.<sup>21</sup> Immediate demands included a price freeze, 'ending poverty', abolition of the incomes policy, general wage increases, reductions in hours, longer holidays, improved fringe benefits, no restrictions upon free collective bargaining; improved pensions, sickness benefits, family and child allowances; rent controls; a crash programme of slum clearance and house construction at the rate of 500,000 per annum; sweeping educational reforms (including a unified system of higher education) and a school building programme; 'intensive building of new hospitals', a 'network of health centres', greatly extended child care facilities, an adequate national cervical cancer screening service; nationalisation of steel and urban land, an integrated transport system, a fuel and power plan, greater self-sufficiency in agriculture; and a great deal more besides, including some sensible proposals for an effective Race Relations Act.

Only 62,112 votes were cast for the Communist candidates, fewer votes per candidate than in 1964. This time Labour won nearly 48 per cent of the vote and a parliamentary majority of 98 seats over all the other parties. But the swing to Labour had done the Communists no good at all. Ominously the biggest drops in the Communist vote occurred where it had most to lose – West Fife and Rhondda East. The shrinkage of its former strongholds continued and the new centres of struggle produced just 1,072 votes per candidate. According to Gollan's post-mortem 'the only thing the Government couldn't sweep under the carpet was Vietnam. Opposition to this emerged at almost every Wilson meeting'.<sup>22</sup> But there was no disguising the Party's failure to achieve the advances between the two general elections that might have made 57 contests justifiable. Party resources were once again strained to the utmost and the leadership acknowledged that 'many comrades will be asking whether it was correct to fight'. Gollan's answer was that the Party had 'got to be in the electoral struggle to advance, otherwise we will remain on the sidelines'. But the argument was unconvincing by his own earlier admission, two years before, that a genuinely national profile in elections – especially in the absence of proportional representation and strongholds big enough to take advantage of it – required a prior growth in the size of the Party. This had not happened. No breakthrough had occurred in local politics. Yet it was trapped in numerous dilemmas arising from this electoral strategy, including the fact that it argued for left unity yet contested elections as an independent organisation. Its electoral policy, Gollan admitted, had 'a tortuous and chequered history' and the Party 'had tried every variant' giving 'the impression of indecision' and of being 'governed by tactical political considerations'. Consistency and principle were needed, he seemed to be saying. But consistency and principle in a losing cause amounted to persistence in error in the estimation

of internal critics such as Sid French of the Surrey District. Such critics, however, never divided the leadership on this issue and were easily contained at congress. By the summer of 1966 all introspection was in any case put aside as the Communists got back to the business of opposition – the business the Party was comfortable with. Wilson announced a ‘wage freeze’ in July and the Party’s instructions to militants was unequivocal – mobilise and destroy.<sup>23</sup>

It had only recently reiterated the Leninist rationale for its existence: workers could not spontaneously achieve a socialist consciousness. The working class needed the Communist Party to give the Labour movement a socialist consciousness based on scientific Marxism and to lead ‘the workers and their allies in all struggles which confront them’ and ‘provide the organisation for the vanguard of the working class’. It was ‘the special task’ of the CP to fulfil these functions. Quite simply ‘only the Communist Party’ could perform this role.<sup>24</sup> The Party was required ‘to give purpose to the daily struggles’ of the working class, ‘linking them with and showing their place in the fight for political power’. Marxism enabled the Communists ‘to act in the interests of the whole working class and ... to act in their future as well as their present interests’. It was not magic which supplied these powers but cold, rational analysis. The people would fight on their immediate interests and the Party would steer a path that narrowed rather than widened the gap between the vanguard and the masses. It was therefore ...

... deeply concerned with the defence and improvement of the immediate living conditions of the people *within capitalism*. It regard[ed] the fight on these issues as an essential aspect of the class struggle against capitalism without which the fight for socialism was impossible.

No aspect of the struggle was too humble. It believed that ‘Every victory in the immediate struggle weakens capitalism [and] strengthens the working class’ – but only if the Communists worked correctly and the workers consequently learned the facts about capitalism in the course of their struggles. They had to utilise the one weapon which their enemies lack – great numbers. The passive, electoralist organisation of Labour, which subordinated the whole party to the needs of the parliamentary leadership, was not interested in this project. It was thus ‘incapable of leading the British working class to the victory of socialism’.<sup>25</sup> But the Party, small though it was, could help to correct this weakness. The wages struggle – which increasingly embraced the public sector – combined with the campaign for an alternative programme and the Party’s many electoral interventions, particularly in the unions, would change the balance of forces within the ‘labour movement’. The pro-capitalist Labour leadership would be eliminated in this process. The Communists would grow in numbers, but their influence would rise even faster.

## NOTES

1. *British Road to Socialism*, CPGB, London 1951, p14.
2. Pollitt was determined to do this in his Political Report to the 1952 congress, having received plenty of correspondence alerting him to the opportunities presented by the 'new feeling of militancy' within the constituency Labour Parties and of the dangers of sectarianism within the CP. See CP/CENT/CONG/08/05, correspondence from Alun Thomas, John Mahon, William Lauchlan and Bert Papworth. Of course some members of the Party opposed the new programme as a right-wing deviation from the true path.
3. J. Gollan, *The British Political System*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1954.
4. The Tory MP Craik Henderson composed *Dangers of a Supreme Parliament*. Beloff contributed 'Counting the Votes', *The Fortnightly*, January 1953; Amery published *Thoughts on the Constitution*; and *The Times* (2/2/53) wanted the parties to assume 'a corporate sense of responsibility for the guidance and education of the electorate' – which might otherwise do foolish things.
5. *British Road to Socialism*, CPGB, London 1958, p20.
6. See *World News and Views*, 27 April 1946; 22 March 1947, and 9 June 1951 for the local election results.
7. *Daily Worker*, 26 and 27 October 1951.
8. *Daily Worker*, 1 October 1951.
9. Peggy Kahn, interview with Frank Watters, *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 43, autumn 1981, pp54-67, p58.
10. *World News and Views*, 9 June 1951 and 16 May 1953.
11. *World New and Views*, 25 May 1957.
12. H. F. Srebrnik, *Jews and British Communism, 1935-45*, Valentine Mitchell and Co., Essex 1995, pp148-164.
13. Untitled document, May 1949, CP/CENT/INT/66/02.
14. 'Information Document for Party Speakers on the Israeli Government', February 1953, CP/CENT/INT/68.
15. The origin of this group lay in the murky world of the Trotskyists within the Labour Party. Factionalism within Gerry Healy's small band of followers produced Lawrence's turn to the Communist Party.
16. Though Gordon McLennan claimed 40 in his speech on left unity to the 30th Party congress in 1967.
17. Editorial, *Daily Worker*, 3 May 1955 and 'Not a Penny for the Poorest', 5 May 1955.
18. J. Gollan, 'Press Statement', 13 September 1964, CP/CENT/STAT/2/1.
19. J. Gollan, 'Labour in Power – What Next?', *Comment*, 28 November 1964, pp759-62.
20. *Ibid*, p761.
21. CPGB, *New Britain – People's Britain*, CPGB, London 1966, p4.
22. 'Report on the General Election', presented by John Gollan to the Executive on 23 April 1966, CP/CENT/STAT/2/3.
23. 'Press Release', 20 July 1966 and 'Press Statement', 11 September 1966, CP/CENT/STAT/2/3.
24. CPGB, *The Role of the Communist Party*, CPGB, London 1965, p7.
25. *Ibid*, p15.

## 7. Allies and Enemies on the Left

While the Labour Party leadership consistently ostracised and deplored the Communist Party, the Communists were necessarily equivocal about the rival which commanded most working-class votes and enjoyed the loyalty of the big industrial unions. The Communists entered into various contests with Labour, often behaved conspiratorially when doing so, but also sought alliances with Labour people. To this permanent contradiction was added the many tactical changes determined by the Party's relationship with the Soviet Union. In the recent past the Communists had looked favourably upon the continuance of the wartime coalition, then changed their minds and warmly supported the Labour victory of 1945, only to turn against Labour again when Bevin's foreign policy proved impervious to all left criticism. By the end of 1948 Communist propaganda was entirely geared to the requirements of the Cold War and when Attlee's second government ended prematurely in 1951 it was a case of good riddance to a bad thing.<sup>1</sup>

### VERDICT ON THE ATTLEE GOVERNMENTS

The decision to call the general election for 25 October 1951 was declared by Dutt, with typical exaggeration, to be 'a signal of the deepening bankruptcy of the war policy and of the consequent deteriorating situation in Britain' – an attempt either to get a mandate for the 'policy of rearmament' or to hand over responsibility for this to the Tories.<sup>2</sup> But Dutt's observations reflected accurately enough the Communists' main charge against the Labour Governments, that they had subordinated British policy to the interests of the USA and had entered an anti-Communist alliance which threatened war against the Soviet Union. The Cold War also led the Communist leaders to emphasise and repackage an old truth; whereas the Comintern had once depicted reformism as an instrument of the ruling class within the workers' movement it was now declared that 'the dominant Right Wing Labour leadership' tied both the party and the trade unions to the service of capitalism. This way of presenting the problem accorded with the current Communist strategy which clung to the prospect of

replacing the leadership of the Labour and trade union organisations with reliable socialists.

In the Communist view, as we have seen, the Attlee Governments had allowed Britain to become the pawn, colony and military base of the USA. Labour had held on to the Empire-based world role and opened a new era of colonial exploitation symbolised by the soaring sterling balances (which almost tripled to £1,222 million between 1945 and 1952). It had supported barbaric wars in Malaysia and Korea. At home it had failed the nation. The programme of nationalisation was virtually worthless. It had paid generous compensation to the former owners and was too small in scale to have any transformative effect, employing only 12 per cent of the workforce. The public sector functioned as a source of subsidised energy and cheap transport for the private profit-making sector. It was a 'comic opera' spurious socialism, significant largely as evidence of 'the real economic tendency of large scale capitalism to advance to monopoly and to state ownership as the highest form of advanced capitalism'.<sup>3</sup> To prove the point, all the main developments in public ownership in that social democratic 'model' of Sweden, Dutt triumphantly observed in 1951, were taken prior to the formation of the first social democratic government. And yet the Communists also complained that nationalisation had not gone far enough. Herbert Morrison, they pointed out, had demanded 'consolidation' at the 1948 Labour party conference and Hugh Dalton was already celebrating the virtues of the 'mixed economy' in the same year. More nationalisation was required but 'on a different basis', one that would remove the capitalist elements from the Boards and obtain 'direct participation of the working class', while drastically reducing compensation and ending the policy of subsidising private industry.

Labour's claims as a party of income and wealth redistribution were equally threadbare according to the Communists. The trumpeted comparison invoked by the Labour politicians was always between 1938 and 1951, rather than 1945 and 1951. This enabled party propagandists to take credit for the limited measures of redistribution caused by the Second World War. The war brought a return to full employment and a nominal money inflation of the proportion of wages in national income. The war also necessitated increased taxation on wealth to meet war needs. By contrast the period of the Labour Governments saw the gradual return to the normal, or 'a redistribution backwards'. Yet Labour's Chancellor of the Exchequer, Stafford Cripps, announced that the redistribution of incomes by the taxation of the rich had already reached its upper limit by 1950 and this soon became the conventional wisdom on the subject among the social democratic leadership. For the Communists this judgement, oft-repeated by the Gaitskellites, qualified as knavery rather than foolishness.

Nor could Labour claim that the social services represented some

sort of redistribution of income to the working class. The official report of the Marshall Plan administration in 1950 – *Report of the ECA Administration to the United Kingdom*<sup>4</sup> – compared a social service income per working class family averaging 57 shillings per week with an average tax bill of 67.8 shillings per week for such families. It was clear to the Communists that the workers stumped up the money for welfare. Each household, moreover, made a further 10 shillings per week available for the military, the police and the servicing of the national debt. Beveridge had devised a Spartan minimum for purposes of social security but even this had been invalidated by the fall in the value of benefits occasioned by the rise in the cost of living, as he acknowledged himself in November 1953.<sup>5</sup> Inflation reached 9.5 per cent in 1950 and though it fell to 2 per cent in 1953 and 1954 it rose to 3.5 per cent in 1955 and 4.5 per cent in 1956.

The Attlee Governments, according to the Communists, left a legacy of wage freeze, attrition of social services, savage colonial wars and frenzied rearmament. The fall in real living standards was measurable even in the official figures as the rate of inflation exceeded the growth of money wages. By October 1952, Peter Kerrigan claimed, men's wage rates bought 6 per cent less than in 1947 and the immediate prospect was of further deterioration.<sup>6</sup> The chronic deficit of the balance of payments and the dwindling gold and dollar reserves spoke of a 'sick and impoverished regime'.<sup>7</sup> But the Labour leadership which left office in October 1951 was at one with its Conservative counterpart on the need to combine domestic austerity with an anti-Communist world role, even if this meant crippling armaments budgets and the danger of nuclear war.

### THE NEW THINKERS

The Communists were quick to emphasise that the Labour leadership had abandoned socialism in favour of 'social justice' – an objective which Adenauer, Franco, and the Pope also subscribed to in the late 1940s and early 1950s. John Strachey's pamphlet, *The Just Society* (1951), was lambasted accordingly, as was the 1950 election manifesto, *Let Us Win Through Together*, with its call for a new moral order, rather than a new social order. Its successor, the 1951 manifesto, was damned as being even more devoid of reformist aspirations. Gollan quoted *The Times* editorial (10 October 1951) which noted that: 'The word "nationalisation" does not even appear ... A close reading of the document reveals only one hard proposal: the Labour Government it appears are seeking renewal of their mandate so that they may "set up new auction markets in provincial towns"'.<sup>8</sup> When *New Fabian Essays* appeared in 1952, the Communists identified its purpose as being to 'redefine socialism so as to rob it of its essence'. Crossman's introductory essay, according to the Communists, created a bogey – the managerial society – which merely served to distract attention from the

real enemy, 'monopoly capitalism'. Strachey took up the same theme in *Contemporary Capitalism* (1956) and Ron Bellamy subjected the fashionable idea of the managerial revolution to a searching and measured critique in *Marxist Quarterly*.<sup>9</sup> Crosland, meanwhile, conjured capitalism away by falsely claiming that unemployment was banished forever by a Keynesian state which now allegedly dominated the economic life of the country. But, as a Communist reviewer said, 'No one takes all this Fabian nonsense about Socialist planning seriously, least of all the capitalist class'. After Labour's Margate annual conference in 1953 a David Low cartoon already depicted the broken figure of a Napoleonic Bevan, together with the dejected marshalls, Attlee and Morrison, under tattered banners proclaiming 'Non-Planning' and 'Nationalisation Postponed Indefinitely'. All that was needed was the title of David's original, 'the Retreat from Moscow'; but Low forbore to mention it.

Some Labour thinkers had already come round to the view that the problem of conflict in society lay not so much in 'a residue of objectively measurable social inequality', to quote Crosland, but in the persistence of a deep-rooted sense of inequality. It was necessary therefore to eradicate this sense of class. Nothing could be more reactionary from the Communist point of view. A psychological confidence trick was being proposed to take the place of real social change. Austin Albu's contribution to *New Fabian Essays* demanded a similar placebo in industry where the 'feeling' of participation was wanted and might be obtained by token representation of workers on boards of directors. This was anathema to the Communists who saw their best chance of making an impact in politics through the intensification of the wages struggle. Against the fashionable ideas of the day the Communists insisted that Britain was a class-divided, deeply unequal society. Whereas *Socialist Commentary* (January 1956) insisted that: 'Economic power is no longer a characteristic fruit of property owning', the Communists drew attention to the 4 per cent of the population who owned two-thirds of it; whereas the leading Fabians talked as if poverty was almost eradicated,<sup>10</sup> the Communists argued that social reform had hardly scratched the surface of such problems; and whereas the *Daily Herald* solemnly declared that 'there's no such thing as class', the Communists deigned to disagree.<sup>11</sup> When the Fabians rediscovered the truth about affluence in the early 1960s Britain was not only discovered to have poverty, the Communists noted, but its spending on health, cash benefits and education were seen to be lagging behind the Scandinavian social democracies, the Netherlands, Austria, and West Germany.<sup>12</sup>

Foreign policy dominated Communist propaganda in the early 1950s however. When Labour published a new programme in 1953, *Challenge to Britain*, Dutt contrasted its perspective of further domestic material sacrifices with the promise of abundance in socialist Russia

contained in Malenkov's report to the CPSU in October of the previous year.<sup>13</sup> The Labour programme, he argued, was an expression of the right-wing policy which ignored the roots of Britain's economic problems – its grotesque overseas commitments (which represented a heavier burden in proportionate terms than in any major country of the world) and the accompanying Cold War trade bans with the Communist bloc. Instead, the Labour programme focused on the need for increased production and restrained consumption, hiding reality behind a picture of 'fifty million people, crowded on these islands', struggling to earn a living in the world by increasing their exports. Yet the net deficit on the balance of payments was dwarfed by overseas military expenditure; trade with Russia and China was closed by the American Battle Act; and Labour had effectively repudiated public ownership as a means of transforming capitalism.

Revisionism was treated as 'a weak and watery echo of the original article' in most Communist polemics rather than a significantly novel argument resting on Keynesian assumptions. Throughout the 1950s the Party continued to assert that reformism's imperial basis was being undermined and that this was 'the key to the economics and politics of modern Britain'.<sup>14</sup> Labour's defeats in the general elections of 1955 and 1959 – hailed as evidence of affluence, embourgeoisement, and the decay of the old class politics in conventional opinion – seemed to cheer Dutt as evidence of the decay of 'the indispensable safety valve partner of Conservatism'.<sup>15</sup> In 1960 he could see Labour, in common with all the other social democratic parties of Western Europe, openly embracing liberal-capitalism and leaving the Communist Parties as 'the advocates of the peaceful and constitutional path of transition to socialism'. The official line, however, remained the old one – a united struggle by all who stood for socialism to defeat the anti-socialist offensive increasingly associated with the Gaitskellites.

## THE PERSISTENCE OF LABOUR

For all their contempt for the Labour leadership the Communists were forced to recognise that their enemies were well dug in. Dutt preferred to think of them depending on:

... the thick crust of ancient forms, institutions, habits, prejudices and illusions, dating from the era of unchallenged imperialist supremacy and 'prosperity', of ingrained social conservatism, whether acting directly through the Tory Party or enthroned in the citadels of the old labour movement ... heavy as a choking, suffocating overgrowth to ban and kill and strangle all that is new and living.

As the oldest capitalist country 'which long enjoyed unchallenged world supremacy and monopoly' the imperialist assumptions lived on, deeply entrenched in British institutions, including those of the labour

movement. This explanation of conservatism offered hope to the Communists, as it always had done since the days of Lenin, because imperial decline was expected to take the foundations away from the entrenched prejudices which held the Party back. Then the 'Britain of Elizabeth, Churchill and Attlee' would be 'relegated to a museum piece'. That is why it was all the more important for the Communists to chisel away at the oligarchical structures which might protect the Labour and trade union leaderships from the coming wrath of the rank and file.

Labour, 'the second party of capitalism', was permanently divided in the Communist view between right-wing leaders 'politically corrupted by imperialism' and a working class that was being educated by the disillusioning experience of Labour governments and the uplifting experience of advances made in the socialist bloc and the former colonial world. The Communists never admitted that the Labour leadership's policies represented the views or values of most Labour voters, much less that winning the support of the millions of workers who voted Conservative might entail less, rather than more, 'socialism'. Instead they focused on the unrepresentative, middle-class, character of the Labour leadership; the poisonous influence of social democratic ideology concerning the neutrality of the state; the long period of political stagnation following the defeat of Chartism in which the liberal capitalist ideology permeated sections of the working-class leadership; and the role of imperialism in keeping this ideology alive. Communists accused the Labour leaders of delegitimising extra-parliamentary struggle and of maintaining their stranglehold on the party by a combination of the threats and bribery used to keep order in the parliamentary party and the black lists, prohibitions and expulsions used in the extra-parliamentary organisations.<sup>16</sup>

The electoral system permitted two parties to dominate Parliament and though it distorted reality by giving the appearance of two equal social forces, 'the underlying character of class confrontation and latent class struggle' could be seen in the resulting virtual deadlock. But the 'placid majestic alternation of the parties' associated with Victorian times was destined for disruption by the harsh reality of class conflict 'in the era of the deepening general crisis of capitalism'. The Communists told themselves that: 'Only the practical collaboration and veiled coalition of the top leadership on both sides makes this precarious balance for the moment workable to maintain the policies of imperialism and finance-capital'.<sup>17</sup> The Labour leadership for its part required a complex machinery of bans, Standing Orders, exclusions, party discipline and proscriptions to keep this system alive, not to mention the leadership's 'violent fulminations against industrial action' and general commitment to a public discourse of demobilisation whenever activists took the initiative. *The Times* (8 October 1953) commented on the similarity of the party conferences while admitting

that it was partially concealed 'because the Conservative Party does not seek to maintain the illusion that its conference is a democratic body exercising direct control over the party's leaders'. It soon became an influential academic thesis that the two main parties in Britain exhibited a single, hierarchical, internal regime.<sup>18</sup>

Communists looked wistfully at Italy and France where ministerial crises, broken governments and Communist votes abounded. What a contrast with Britain

where the conception of a parliament controlling the government in place of the government controlling parliament is regarded as a fantastic failure to understand the essence of parliamentarism. The assumption of ruling from the top downwards, with effective machinery to close every vent of democratic control from below, and an iron-clad two party system to make parliament the rubber stamp of the will of the executive, is so implicit in the entire constitutional structure in Britain that any suggestion of introducing a democratic element arouses horror.<sup>19</sup>

But the Communist leadership accepted that there was no chance of the two-party cartel reforming the electoral system and that it would have to work within the present arrangements underpinning the top-down structures. Similarly it would have to work within the oligarchical structures of the unions and the Labour Party. But while the electoral struggle proved sterile, it was already possible to derive hope from the 2-3 million votes cast for policies of which the Communists approved at the Douglas TUC in 1953, and the 1.75-2 million votes recorded for dissenting positions of a similar sort at the Margate Labour conference in the same year. Here they identified 'the emergence of a powerful group of important trade unions', including the engineers, electricians and railwaymen, in alliance with the majority of constituency parties. And it was this alliance, they confidently thought, even in the dark days of 1954, that 'will grow and develop and is the key to the transformation of the situation in the Labour Party'.<sup>20</sup> This was why the right-wing union leaders, according to the Communists, continually threatened to split the party unless the left-wing forces capitulated; 'they are looking ahead to the time when this expanding group of progressive unions, allied with the left forces in the constituency parties, could well win a majority in the Labour Party Conference'.<sup>21</sup>

The revised Party programme made the same point in 1958: 'The trade unions are the decisive force in the Labour Party, and every progressive step in the trade union movement strengthens the Left and progressive tendencies in the Labour Party'.<sup>22</sup> Others, seeing the constituencies as the source of left-wing dynamism and impatient for change, wanted a Labour Party consisting only of individual members. The old reactionary Churchill, seeing this danger himself, for once in his life commended the affiliated unions in 1953, precisely because of

their record of 'restraining the feather-heads, crackpots, vote-catchers and office seekers from putting their folly into action'.<sup>23</sup> But the Communists saw this block voting system as comprising 'a situation full of the greatest political possibilities'. A real change could only come when it was put in the service of the left-wing causes, and when the millions of workers in the unions used their political and industrial strength to oust the right-wing leaders in the Labour Party. Throughout the 1950s the Communists believed that 'peace, wages, and social progress' were the basis for bringing this dominant bloc into existence. The revised Party programme (1958) saw 'the development of the struggle on the immediate issues facing the people [as] the key to building up the united movement'. Chief among these 'immediate issues' was the 'wages struggle'. While 'the ruling class is always trying to put new burdens on working people', asserted the *British Road*, the unions 'vigorously resist any attempt to hold wages down while prices and profits are rising and output per head is steadily increasing'. It followed that this was the weakest link in the chain:

The fight for higher wages and salaries and shorter hours, the fight to protect the position of the shop stewards and trade union organisation, is the daily form of struggle, because it arises out of the fundamental clash of interests between workers and capitalists in production.<sup>24</sup>

'The first essential', according to the programme, was 'to develop this fight'. It was also necessary to extend it to all the issues of the social wage (education, health, housing etc). But there is no doubt that the unions were the crux of the matter and that the Communists' main job was to insert into the wages struggle the message that Britain's economic position could only be decisively improved 'in a Socialist Britain' and by 'the defeat of the war policies abroad'.

### **RIGHT-WING LABOUR**

When Pollitt set out a *Challenge to Labour* in 1954 he made it clear that the Communists regarded the current Labour leadership and its trade union allies as friends and co-thinkers of the 'Tory financiers', united in their zeal for the maintenance of capitalism and imperialism.<sup>25</sup> Pollitt wanted 'united action' with local Labour parties on all the outstanding issues of the day and complained that individual Communists were inclined to sectarianism. But it is clear that his own enthusiasm for Labour was often wanting and that he saw the wages struggle, the Communist factory branches and the unions as the real locus of battle. The Labour leaders and their trade union allies were not socialists and they stood opposed to 'the great wages movement'. Yet 'it is quite true', Pollitt confidently believed, 'that as capitalism gets deeper into its crisis it will find it more difficult to grant even the most modest of the workers' demands without great social upheavals'.<sup>26</sup> It is interesting

that this re-hashed Leninism could still inform the Party's view of its long-term prospects even in the years of full employment. In the meantime it had to get on with the problem of securing alliances with left Labour. Bans and proscriptions had excluded the Communists since 1921 and strengthened the hand of the right. But there was 'no conflict between the Communist Party and the mass membership of the Labour Party' in Pollitt's view. What was wanted was a removal of the bans and proscriptions and a consequent strengthening of the Labour left by the inclusion of the Communists and 'the re-establishment of the original federal basis of the Labour Party'. As to how this would be achieved, nothing coherent emerges from the Communist analysis beyond the prospect of securing the leadership of enough affiliated trade unions to make a difference at the Labour conference.

But on the nature of the Communist seduction of the Labour left there is nothing in the mid-50s. The Party was still wary of the Bevanites and infatuated by its own status as the instrument through which 'the working class shall achieve political power, abolish capitalism, and introduce a new social order':

Unless and until the Communist Party embraces within its ranks hundreds of thousands of members, so that its influence and leadership extends to the majority of the working class, Socialism will not come on to the order of the day as an immediate and practical possibility for Britain. The Communist Party is the most decisive requirement for ending capitalism and advancing along the road to Socialism.<sup>27</sup>

In this view the Communists held the advantage of a Marxist understanding, a clear and unbending commitment and vision of the way forward. The Labour and trade union left, by contrast, 'can never themselves develop the strength necessary to achieve the victory of their own aims', Pollitt told the Party's 23rd National Congress in 1954. It was necessary to build the Party and trade union militancy – this much was obvious from Pollitt's speech. Nothing as clear was said about the Labour left except that 'united action' with it was desirable, but was not always forthcoming. Pollitt did not see – his audience probably did not notice either – that his appeal to Party workers to overcome their 'deep-rooted sectarianism', to admit that 'we do not know it all', and to stop 'creating the impression ... that we are some kind of human beings who never eat, sleep, play or dream', flew in the face of the carefully nurtured conceits he had just given voice to. It was the same in the industrial field where Communists were happy to claim that 'it was inevitable that from the inception of the Communist Party it should be in the forefront of every industrial struggle in Britain during the first half century of its existence'.<sup>28</sup> The vanguardist mentality died hard, but in the 1950s it was positively encouraged by the leadership. The Party was the one essential instrument of the socialist transition, all Communists were enjoined

to believe. Its programme 'is not only the solution to the ever-mounting social problems within Britain. It is also the solution to the problems of the new relations which Britain must establish with the rest of the world'. The Party moreover, linked Britain to 'the most significant thing in world politics today ... the existence of the USSR, People's China and the People's Democracies'.<sup>29</sup> The world had moved on leaving provincial Britain floundering behind. 'It is time for public opinion in Britain to realise this shift in the world focus', said an exasperated Dutt in February 1956 – on the eve, it turned out, of the greatest crisis in the history of the Party.<sup>30</sup>

The appointment of Gaitskell as leader of the Labour party in December 1955 was greeted as simply 'a stab in the back' for the working class. Even pro-Labour journals of the left such as the *New Statesman* had commented on his 'cold and methodical ambition for Party power' and Gaitskell's symbolic significance as 'the embodiment of the new bureaucratic man, the don turned man of affairs' gave rise to numerous expressions of horror and distaste by both the Communists and much of the Labour left.<sup>31</sup> Labour had lost the 1955 general election because of the unpopularity of its right-wing leaders and policies, according to the Communists, and Gaitskell had not even been able to win enough of his own constituency activists to gain election to the NEC. Yet his elevation to the Leadership was 'an integral part of the ... capitalist offensive against the workers'. It was further evidence that resistance had to be based on 'the unity of ... the main body of active trade unionists and Labour party members in co-operation with the Communist Party':

But such a common fight can only be effectively developed to the extent that it has a common voice and a common strategy. That is why the development of the unity of the left and of the effective fight of the working class is inevitably bound up with the role of the Communist Party and of the only militant newspaper of the left, the *Daily Worker*. It is the hard indisputable fact of the present political situation that the Communist Party is the only political party which presents a consistent alternative policy to Toryism, at the same time as organising the fight and participating in the fight in every field.<sup>32</sup>

The Party's insistence on its unique role could not conceal the fact that its analysis of what was wrong with the Labour Party increasingly focused on the quality and character of its leadership, not the bulk of its supporters. At the 25th Congress in 1957 lifting the bans and proscriptions against the Communists was identified as the first step in winning a majority of the Labour Party membership for Marxism. At the 27th Congress in 1961 the struggle to overcome right-wing Labour was identified as the beginning of a campaign which would lead to 'the final elimination of right-wing capitalist influence and leadership'

within the organisation. The message was that the struggle in the Labour Party was decisive and yet with each successive year the prospect of Communist affiliation to the Labour Party receded.

### ALLIES OF A KIND

The conviction that the rational plan was superior to the blind and capricious market was a central socialist belief by end of the war and its feasibility was hardly to be doubted throughout the 1950s and early 1960s. The Communists were convinced that the Soviet Union was living proof of all that could be achieved under the socialist plan. While William Morris had once dreamed of 'A Factory as It Might Be', for example, visitors to the Soviet Union returned, as E. P. Thompson observed in 1955, 'with stories of the poet's dream already fulfilled'.<sup>33</sup> Thompson himself was soon cured of such illusions, but more sophisticated reasons to believe in the socialist credentials of the USSR survived the events of 1956 and some thinkers of the New Left contributed to them, rather than offering a critique of the ruling illusions. The perception of the Soviet Union as a ruthless dictatorship, however, actually grew within the Labour Party in the first years of the Cold War and by June 1950, with the outbreak of the Korean War, *Tribune* described it as the new Nazi Germany.<sup>34</sup> The Communist Party in Britain was routinely denounced during this period by Labour socialists as 'an organised conspiracy' and a 'fifth column' whose initiatives – however superficially worthy – were invariably acts of bad faith, their true aim being to press forward the Soviet interest on any issue. If this mood had lasted it would have been very difficult for the Communists to find allies within the Labour Party. But it changed significantly in the wake of Labour's defeat in the 1951 general election and the onset of the struggle between Bevanites and Gaitskellites for control of the party's future direction. On foreign policy issues Bevan imagined himself to be steering a middle way between the extremes of rabid anti-Communism, as represented by US policy, and blind loyalty to the USSR as represented by the Communist Party. Central to his argument was a conviction which goes to the heart of why so many socialists in this period were still prepared to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt; it was the idea that the unacceptable features of the system – above all the political dictatorship – would inevitably succumb to democratic forces which the dictatorship itself had set in motion by its promotion of the rapid economic and social development of the country. As long as the West provided no pretext (in the form of an aggressive foreign policy) for either the continuation of the dictatorship or a military coup, the socio-economic changes brought about by the Russian Communists would eventually undermine the one-party system.

Labour left-wingers believed that Western aggression, whether in the form of confrontational postures, German rearmament or the arms race,

would at the very least slow down this process of progressive change. Bevan's policy was described by the *Economist* in 1955 as 'expropriation at home and anti-Americanism abroad' but his logic on the Soviet Union owed a great deal to the writings of Isaac Deutscher, the Polish émigré and erstwhile Trotskyist who wrote for *Tribune* during the war and published several eloquent books after it in which the democratisation thesis was developed.<sup>35</sup> In February 1950 Bevan was already openly speculating on how 'the techniques of modern industrial civilisation call for an educated, trained population which in its turn demands full political status'.<sup>36</sup> As it became known how many doctors, scientists, teachers and technicians were being produced in the USSR, and how rapidly its heavy industrial economy was growing, this argument gathered force. After Stalin's death in 1953 considerable optimism was expressed on the Left, not only about the political liberalisation undertaken by his successors but also about Russia's economic transformation. Deutscher notably argued that 'continuous expansion is in fact inherent in planned economy of the socialist, or even of the present Soviet type as the basic form of its movement'.<sup>37</sup> Various commentators reported on the industrial transformation and modernisation of eastern European countries such as Poland and Bulgaria, providing empirical evidence to support aspects of this argument.<sup>38</sup>

By the beginning of 1955 the evidence provided by the Malenkov reforms and the reported increases in consumer goods gave *Tribune* 'great joy'.<sup>39</sup> Early in 1956 an editorial affirmed 'the extent to which their [i.e. Soviet] education surpasses ours' and Khruschev's secret speech in February of that year moved the journal to praise the planning system and the 'strong sense of comradeship and ... passionate identification with the social system instituted in 1917' which distinguished the Soviet system 'even in the darkest days'. Khruschev was seen as a pragmatist, an organiser interested in efficiency and production, a man who needed workers 'who wield the complex tools of modern science'. He would soon discover, *Tribune* contended, that 'the growing army of Soviet technicians ... will not forever be content to be excluded from political influence'.<sup>40</sup> The message was that he who trains scientists, trains citizens.

The Bevanites regarded public ownership as the 'all-important first step' towards socialism,<sup>41</sup> while the need for planning acquired added significance in the 1950s in the context of contemporary anxieties over the social consequences of automation – a problem the Russians claimed to have solved and one which was still generating dire predictions of mass unemployment in the capitalist West in the 1960s.<sup>42</sup> Planning and public ownership were the central, related features of Tribunité socialism just as they were supposed to be the central characteristics of the Soviet economy. Sections of the left were thus predisposed to look favourably on the Soviet experiment. Conversely, those who downplayed public ownership – such as the Labour leader-

ship, particularly after Gaitskell replaced Attlee in 1955 – were perceived as revisionists intent on abandoning socialism in favour of ‘a sterile defence of Welfare Statism’.<sup>43</sup> This could be the basis for Communists and Labour leftists to believe that they were talking the same language of socialism against a common enemy.<sup>44</sup> In the later 1950s there was also a shared perception of Britain’s industrial decline to add to this common stock of Communist and Labour left assumptions. Evidence that the Soviet economy – its science and technology, growth rates and trade – was flourishing because it was planned was eagerly seized upon in the left-wing press. By the end of the decade Soviet successes in these fields had already occupied the attention of innumerable books, articles, enquiries and political speeches. It worried the CIA, the presidential candidates in the Nixon-Kennedy contest of 1960, Harold Macmillan the British Prime Minister, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Newsweek* – with the latter complaining in 1959 that the Soviet Union could be ‘on the high road to economic domination of the world’.<sup>45</sup> But what worried the Right vindicated the Left. Just two weeks after Labour’s third consecutive defeat, in the general election of 1959, a *Tribune* editorial, commenting on Lunik 3’s successful photography of the dark side of the Moon, observed that the Soviet achievement was based on an economy that was ‘one hundred per cent nationalised’. The argument with Labour’s revisionists, it added, was almost superfluous in the light of such evidence.<sup>46</sup>

Admiration for the Soviet economy was often attached to criticism of its political system by members of the Labour Left. There were people who admired both, however, and even among the nominal critics of the dictatorship the critical tone could be *sotto voce*. *Tribune* spoke with several voices on these issues. Misleading reports of a 1930s vintage continued to appear in the 1950s such as Ian Mikardo’s gushing celebration of Russian technological superiority in August 1956<sup>47</sup> but the prevailing message that year was one of hope. Under the title ‘Here is What *Tribune* Believes’ an unsigned article in March 1956 reminded the reader that:

Marxists believe political changes follow in the wake of economic one. This week’s news<sup>48</sup> confirms that truth ... but rebuts the over-simple belief that the process is immediate and automatic. Marx himself never made that error. He allowed for a considerable time lag before a change in economic relations found its reflection in government, in law, and in men’s minds ... In the Soviet Union the time lag has been a generation. There is nothing astonishing about this ... What is happening now is that a Socialist Society whose economic basis was laid in 1917 and has since grown in solidity is taking on political shape. The working class after all its sufferings and sacrifices, sees a chance to enter upon its heritage and enjoy the rights and powers which are essential to it in the twentieth century.<sup>49</sup>

By the summer of 1956 Bevan was even able to find evidence in support of this thesis in the Poznan riots in Poland on the grounds that 'the relaxation, material and political, which is taking place among the Soviets, flows from a greater self-confidence and from strength not weakness'. In late October, as the people revolted, he thought 'the news from Poland could scarcely be better':

De-Stalinization is taking its natural course against the arid centralism associated with Stalinist doctrine and not against the fundamentals of Communist philosophy. It is not a counter-revolution that we are witnessing but the gradual adaptation of Communist practice to the realities of modern society.<sup>50</sup>

The Soviet invasion of Hungary shattered these expectations and *Tribune* devoted many pages of denunciation to the Russian action (though even now Bevan thought 'that the moderate elements in the Kremlin were suddenly overwhelmed by the example given by Anglo-French policy in Egypt').<sup>51</sup> Six months of silence followed during which no articles appeared in the journal to extol the virtues of Soviet political economy. Then Mikardo's 'Moscow Diary' in May 1957 praised the 'controlled liberalisation' that its author found, geared as it was, or so he assured his readers, to 'the pace that the workers and peasants are satisfied with'. Soon after, in July, a '*Tribune special*' reviewed the zig-zags of Soviet policy since 1953, only to conclude triumphantly that such a catalogue of opportunism proved nothing because 'if you want to understand history you must keep your eye on the social forces and not take the political bosses as seriously as they take themselves'. Analysis of the social forces revealed that: 'Capitalism in Soviet Russia had been swept away. It will never be restored. An astounding surge of material progress has gone forward wholly by means of public ownership'. Liberalisation, the article argued, was bound to follow unless the West 'by its intransigence help[s] to disrupt the natural process'.<sup>52</sup>

As the decade drew to a close the number of articles commenting on Russian technological superiority grew, inspired by Sputnik and 'an ever-moving conveyor belt, carrying ever-increasing numbers of artisans, doctors, lawyers, professors, technicians, scientists, artists, the whole kaleidoscope which makes up modern society'. The main message was that planning and progress were linked, while capitalism stultified and inhibited technical progress and maximum production of wealth.<sup>53</sup> The determinist view that all this material progress would bring democracy to the Soviet Union was something one could deduce from these propositions, as we have seen. Connected to that argument was the conviction that Western aggression could only hold up progress; and following behind was the suspicion that that was precisely what it was intended to do. The milieu in which these ideas

existed could not be wholly hostile to the Communists when the latter campaigned for détente, peaceful coexistence and arms cuts; or when they demanded more public ownership and planning; or solidarity with radical nationalists in colonies and former colonies. The world was filled with people who were often trying to emulate the Soviet success or promising to do so if given the chance.

### COMMUNIST-BEVANITE RELATIONS

'Those Labour men who enthusiastically accept Clause Four of the party Constitution obviously have a lot in common with the Communists on economics'.<sup>54</sup> So wrote the *Guardian* in 1962. But it was one thing that a common milieu of ideas was inhabited by such people, quite another that they consistently acted together. Numerous political difficulties blocked the way to sustained joint action, not least Communist sectarianism or the fact that Bevan had no strategy for dealing with the right-wing trade union bosses other than provoking them. When Bevan first emerged as the leader of dissident opinion on foreign policy and the chief opponent of the New Thinkers in 1951-2 he was already tainted in Communist eyes. He had shared in and upheld the policies of the Attlee Governments, which the Communists found so reprehensible during the early Cominform period. His 'incorrect' views led him to attack Communist policies in Eastern Europe.<sup>55</sup> Worse, he supported Tito and had engaged in 'ceaseless slander and vilification of the Socialist Soviet Union'. But it was acknowledged by the Communists that in the twelve months since the end of the Attlee Governments Bevan had continuously extended the area of his criticisms of the Labour leadership. Such a man couldn't be all bad. Dutt promised in 1952 that 'to the extent that any group of Labour representatives associated with Mr. Bevan conduct any degree of fight ... they may be sure of the fullest practical support'.<sup>56</sup> He could not hide his scepticism, however. Bevan's *In Place of Fear* (1952) – 'a cure for insomnia', 'a mood rather than a policy', 'such placid sentiments', said the reviewers, suggested 'a kind of insurance policy against revolution' (the 'Fear' in question being Communism, according to Dutt). But the Communists also noted that its 'rambling mystic complexity' concealed an 'evasion' and that Bevan's targets – laissez-faire and competitive capitalism – did not exist anymore, while the real enemy, monopoly capitalism, was deemed hardly worth a mention.

None of these stern rebukes impressed the Labour leadership and its trade union supporters. Hugh Gaitskell and Arthur Deakin in particular routinely conflated the Bevanites and the Communists. When the Bevanites took six of the seven NEC seats reserved for constituency representatives at the Morecambe conference of 1952, for example, with Bevan himself heading the poll, Gaitskell gave vent to his anger by publicly announcing that about one-sixth of the constituency delegates at the conference 'appeared to be Communists or Communist-

inspired'.<sup>57</sup> For the next few years the Bevanites drew the wrath of the party oligarchy as a divisive element that played into the hands of the Communist Party. Unofficial intra-party groups were outlawed, forcing the Bevanites to meet clandestinely. The Labour and trade union elite was full of animosity and rivalry. Bevan failed to win the deputy leadership in 1953 and resigned from the shadow cabinet in 1954 in order to reverse the narrow victory for German rearmament (113 to 104) recorded by the Parliamentary Labour Party. For their part, the Communists softened their dismissive tone as it became clear that the Bevanites continued to provide the main pole of dissidence over foreign and domestic policy. When Crossman suggested that the real importance of the 1953 Margate conference 'was that it formally and solemnly ended the open warfare inside the Labour leadership' (*Sunday Pictorial*, 4 October 1953), it was Dutt who rushed in to deny it, pointing to the 'solid unbreakable left vote of one and a half to two millions on every division'. The following Easter Gollan told the Party congress that 'the greatest thing that Harry Pollitt ever did ... was when he turned the attention of this Party to the trade unions'. Labour's Margate conference of 1953 was worth comparing to that of 1926, according to Gollan, in order to measure the progress towards 'that triumphant militant Labour movement we will yet have':

Because the most pleasing thing about Margate, comrades, was the way the right wing, scared when they get into difficulty, start using this block vote. But now the perspective emerges that this block vote is going to be used in a progressive direction and will send the right-wingers scurrying for cover and shouting for all they are worth. Because, make no mistakes about it, the perspective of this congress and the practical possibilities arising to achieve our policy, show that the majority of workers in every trade union want a progressive militant policy and we will yet see the results of what happens in the Labour movement as a result of this.<sup>58</sup>

The Communists were not yet persuaded, however, that the Bevanites were synonymous with this left, and clearly hoped that the trade union left vote was susceptible to their own influence. It was even reckoned that most of the constituency amendments to the revisionist *Challenge to Britain* were inspired by ideas foreign to *Tribune* but close to the *Daily Worker*.<sup>59</sup> Dutt thought this division of the Labour left was a sign of strength, precisely because it linked part of it to the Communist Party and provided evidence of its influence in resolutions dear to Communist hearts such as the recent condemnation of the alliance with Franco, the emergence of a measure of criticism of the USA and Attlee's call for great power talks. All these were 'valuable levers'. The Communists could already smell the right-wing fear of a trade union-CLP alliance of the left which 'might swing the Labour Party to the left, [so] that the block vote might operate against them, and ... the

machinery of control in their hands might no longer prove automatically effective'. But they were still working on the principle, as outlined by Pollitt in 1952, that the way forward was 'strengthening the fighting spirit and solidarity of the workers in the wages struggle within the factories and the unions under Communist leadership'. 'Life itself' would provide the opportunities for pulling along the Labour militants in a direction determined by the Party.<sup>60</sup>

German rearmament in particular galvanised the Labour left in the course of 1953-4 when over 150 constituency parties registered their opposition to party policy. *Tribune* further enraged the Bevanites' enemies by supporting the dock strike of 1954 which led to an exodus from Deakin's TGWU as thousands of dockers in the northern ports joined the rival National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers' (NASD) union. The Bevanites stood exposed as wreckers in the eyes of Deakin, Gaitskell and the Labour establishment. The Communists for once were inclined to agree, it being central to the Party's industrial strategy that unions were required to grow and amalgamate through the efforts of their militants, not suffer haemorrhages that – especially in the decisive transport union – might make it easier for the hated right-wing oligarchy to remain in place.

Though the regime of centralism operating in the Labour party forced the Bevanite group of MPs to operate secretly between 1952 and 1954, there was no disguising its factional character. The votes on German rearmament at the 1954 TUC congress and at Scarborough just over two weeks later narrowly upheld the leadership. But Gaitskell also defeated Bevan for the party Treasurership by a margin of more than 2 million votes, making it abundantly clear that the big unions favoured Gaitskell as Attlee's successor. Two days after this setback Bevan attacked the leadership with venom, alluding to Gaitskell as a 'desiccated calculating machine'. Bevan had known in advance that he could not win the Treasurership – an 'out-moded institution', he thought, of practically no utility – but was determined to 'split every trade union and expose Deakin and Tom Williamson by making them prefer an intellectual like Gaitskell to a miner like me'.<sup>61</sup> He was set on 'rousing the constituencies' too as part of the same exercise of exposing 'the bureaucracy of the big unions', especially the TGWU and the General and Municipal Workers' Union – even though his candidature automatically entailed voluntary resignation from a position of influence in the shadow cabinet. Bevan thought it 'essential that the movement should now be educated in the realities of the situation'. But whereas the Communists sought to manipulate the block vote for their own ends, Bevan implied that 'the instrumentality of the block vote', now 'infinitely worsened by the dominant position exercised by the two general unions', could somehow be swept aside by the 'the movement'. This prospect looked utterly remote when his own union, the NUM, voted more than two-to-one against him for the Treasurership.

Such a result was so counter-intuitive to the Left that it could only be explained by reference to the operation of the Labour-trade union oligarchy.

After his conference defeats on German rearmament and the Treasurership Bevan stepped up his campaign for renewed summit talks with the Russians (a favourite Communist demand of course) in the context of growing public concern about the testing of H-bombs. In March 1955, in a Commons defence debate in which Attlee and Churchill agreed about the virtues of nuclear deterrence, Bevan intervened to imply criticism of Attlee's leadership, or rather the lack of it, and led 62 MPs in abstaining from a Labour amendment to the Defence White Paper. The PLP then voted to withdraw the whip from Bevan who narrowly escaped expulsion from the party when the NEC voted 14 to 13 on 23 March in support of Attlee's compromise motion, asking for an enquiry and assurances as to his future conduct. Soon after this spat Eden replaced Churchill as Prime Minister and the Conservative Government announced that a general election would be held on 26 May. Labour's public divisions probably contributed to its defeat and the Conservatives were returned with an increased parliamentary majority. The Communists nevertheless continued to draw comfort from what they took to be an embryonic alliance of left trade unions and the majority of constituency party activists. Though the Labour right retained its grip on the party machine it was perceived as an embattled minority ready to split the party if that was what was required to keep control. The H-bomb issue was identified as the device that might bring matters to a head in 1955. The Communists also continued to call for the lifting of all the bans which impeded joint action with the Labour left. The basis for united action clearly existed, in their view, in a common support for more nationalisation, wage militancy and social reform funded by defence cuts.<sup>62</sup> But the Labour left was preoccupied by the factional and personality conflicts within the Parliamentary Labour Party. When Attlee resigned as leader in December 1955, Bevan was decisively beaten by Gaitskell for the vacancy. He also lost to James Griffith for the deputy leadership. If there was a strong left wing in the Labour Party it remained outside the parliamentary party and under the control of party managers and trade union bureaucracies. An organised Bevanite left was yet to realise its potential in Labour's extra-parliamentary organisations, and some Communists doubted that it ever would. Meanwhile Gaitskell's accession to the leadership position was perceived by many commentators as symbolic of the ideological shift away from socialism and the traditional working class that was already underway in both the Labour Party and the wider society.

There was no prospect of the Communists being formally acknowledged as allies of the Labour left,<sup>63</sup> let alone welcomed into the fold as an organised faction as the Party desired, even before the events of 1956.

Speculation to the contrary, prompted by the public musings of G. D. H. Cole in the wake of the apparent 'de-Stalinization' of eastern Europe, was completely extinguished by the events of the autumn.<sup>64</sup> Even during the brief honeymoon period between February and October 1956 Communists responded to the conciliatory sounds emanating from the optimists of the Labour left such as Bevan and Cole with a compromise that would only go as far as recognising the 'indispensability' of an organised political party based on Marxism, together with recognition of the 'indispensable role of all socialists and progressive fighters in the trade unions and Labour Party'.<sup>65</sup> If this was not clear enough it was pointed out elsewhere that the Labour Party did not engage in political activity as the Communists understood it; it only came to life during general elections and attached little significance 'to work in industry'. It had a different understanding of socialism and did not recognise the need for a Communist Party. The aim of the Communists, it was stressed, was 'a united Party based on the principles of Marxism'.<sup>66</sup> This actually meant an enlarged Communist Party, although 'realists' within the Party acknowledged by the mid-50s that an enormous amount of work had to be done in converting trade union and Labour activists to the long-term programmatic aims of the Communists before the campaign to end the bans had the slightest chance of success. The cause of 'progressive unity' had always been defeated in the past – most recently by the Labour conference of 1944 – and seemed to have been buried once and for all when a constitutional amendment precluding the possibility of Communist affiliation was carried by a large majority in 1946. Yet Emile Burns repeated the standard line that Communist affiliation to the Labour Party was 'practicable and desirable' in June 1956, at a time when Khruschev's revelations about Stalin had served to reinforce the Party's pariah status in the eyes of many people.<sup>67</sup> In several unions the exposé of Stalin was the signal for a propaganda attack on the CP and even in the Communist-dominated ETU the repression in Hungary was roundly condemned.<sup>68</sup>

In a sense the Party had to be in a state of denial about the true extent of its marginality. There was no recognition that many trade unionists supported the Labour right wing and that about 20 per cent of them actually voted Conservative. Nor did the Party appreciate that it was something more than 'misunderstandings' which made the Labour left wary of Communists and critical of Communism. (The electorate itself only rarely entered into the Communist consciousness.) The Party had tried and failed to get 'the trade union membership [to] insist on sending delegates to the Labour Party who [would] represent the desire for a change in policy' and had failed to persuade 'individual trade unions [to] include Communists who pay the levy in their panel of prospective Parliamentary candidates' and so provoke consideration of 'the issue of revising the constitution'.<sup>69</sup> The Communists knew that there were far too many trade unions and that

all sorts of idiosyncratic rules governed their internal life.<sup>70</sup> Changing this complex and often undemocratic picture would have been a huge task even for a Party ten times the size of the CPGB. But the British Party was seriously handicapped by the lack of a wider and deeper sympathy for its politics, and this allowed union bosses to stifle discussion in the name of combating Communism even in unions where the Communist presence was negligible.<sup>71</sup> Even in a union like the NUR, in which leadership positions were determined by the votes of delegates to its small AGM, rather than the whole membership – and thus was arguably congenial ground for a vanguard organisation to operate within – the challenge of a Communist candidate (Dave Bowman) for the position of Assistant General Secretary in 1958 was rendered invalid when two of the union's branches invoked rule 4, clause 4 of the union's constitution which insisted that the post-holder had to be able to deputise for the General Secretary at the Labour conference.<sup>72</sup> Delegates to the NUR's AGM voted on three subsequent occasions – in 1961, 1964 and 1967 – to maintain this exclusion even though the rules allowed Communists to hold office at every other level. As late as December 1968 a Communist, Harold Leigh, was nominated as a candidate for the Presidency, having taken the precaution of resigning his membership of the Communist Party the previous June. But he had to take the union to court in 1969 to protect his candidacy when his opponents, led by General Secretary Sidney Greene,<sup>73</sup> challenged it on the grounds that his application for membership of the Labour Party had not been accepted in time for the union election. Leigh subsequently won in court but lost the rescheduled election. Dave Bowman, faced with similar blockages for the Presidency in 1970, decided not to go to court in view of the apparent backlash visited upon Leigh. He eventually resigned from the Communist Party at a later date, joined the Labour Party and finally won the Presidency at the 1974 AGM.

The Communists had to find proxies who could attend the Labour conference or attend themselves in a purely advisory capacity in relation to their own union delegations, as in cases of the ETU, the AEU and NUM. They did achieve a level of joint activity in the factories and in many trade union branches with non-Party people but only on a narrow range of issues. They could also point to MPs who took up arguments and causes advanced by the Party. They knew that the trade union activists did so to a far greater extent than their leaders in many unions. It was possible, for example, to get many more left-wing resolutions carried by the unions than ever survived the compositing process at TUC and Labour Party conferences.<sup>74</sup>

The union grassroots sometimes supported very radical positions indeed. Critics replied that this was explained by poor attendance at branch meetings and the greater stamina of the Communist activists, whose powers of endurance kept them busy when everyone else had gone home. In the ETU, the eighth largest union in the country by 1961, the

Communists had successfully used this greater capacity for concentrated energy to entrench themselves in the union's leadership positions. The union had consistently pursued a policy of wage militancy since the Second World War and had supported stock Communist positions on east-west trade, peace, and disarmament at every opportunity. Unlike many other unions the ETU elected its officers and forced them to seek re-election on a regular basis. The Communist leadership could rightly point to the union's spectacular growth and claim that its militant policies were strongly supported by the membership. But there was no doubt that the ETU also showed more interest in politics than most other unions and that most of its resolutions which found their way to the TUC originated with the union's Communist-dominated executive rather than its conference floor. While the union's wage militancy commanded general support among union activists, its political militancy was sometimes contested, especially when the executive's view diverged from that of the Labour Party and its left wing in particular.<sup>75</sup>

The ETU position showed that the Party was not content to set the rank and file against the trade union bureaucracy. The Communists proclaimed their trust in the 'democratic machinery'. The task was defined as making sure that 'the whole of the democratic machinery of British trade unionism [is] utilised to follow through ...positive results', while making 'every effort...to build up 100 per cent trade union membership, coupled with effective union job organisations giving full protection to the stewards and making appeals to various sections of the workers, especially the women and the youth'.<sup>76</sup> This involved consistent support for wage militancy – in a period when the wage rates of manual workers was rising faster than the retail price index – as well as gaining control of the trade union apparatus.<sup>77</sup> The Party wanted fewer unions, strong shop steward organisations and active branches, periodic election of all national executive and full-time officials, sovereign annual or biennial elected conferences, and no bans of either a political or religious character. The ETU ballot-rigging scandal (which we examine in the next chapter) also made them keener on personal and properly supervised balloting and more concerned to find allies on the left.

The Communists were generally the most enthusiastic trade unionists and they were operating in a favourable context in the 1950s, as the previously mentioned growth of real wages indicates. In 1945 2,510,000 trade unionists were affiliated to the Labour Party, by 1958 the figure had grown to 5,628,000. While individual membership of the party fell from just over 1.3 million in 1953 to 634,000 in 1970, the affiliated trade union membership stabilised at around 5.5 million. "If it wasn't for the Commies I don't know how we would collect our political levy" confessed the Assistant General Secretary of a large craft union'.<sup>78</sup> But it was also true that trade union affiliation figures revealed little or nothing about the individual trade unionist's support for Labour and socialist politics; the link with the Labour Party could be politically

unimportant to the individuals concerned. The numbers paying into the fund fluctuated according to the method of payment and union leaders manipulated the figures themselves to suit their own narrow political purposes. In 1954 and 1955, for example, the TGWU increased the affiliation figure so that Arthur Deakin had more votes to use against Nye Bevan and the left. The NUM, NUGMW, and NUPE also over-affiliated. Together with the leadership of the miners and NUGMW, Deakin favoured Bevan's expulsion from the party in March 1955, such was the degree of antipathy to the left and all critics of the party leadership. Faced with this considerable block to their ambitions, the Communists nevertheless stuck to their programmatic perspective of changing the unions in order to change the Labour Party, even when this meant working in a union which banned Communists from holding office altogether, as in the TGWU.

Raising the 'bans and proscriptions' within the TGWU proved impossible throughout the 1950s, even after Frank Cousins' election to the leadership in 1956. In the NUM, which sent the largest delegation to the Labour Party conference, it proved impossible to win the union for the sort of left-wing policies associated with the Bevanites. The Welsh and Scottish coalfields were another matter, however. In Scotland, for example, the coalfields of West Fife, Lanarkshire and South Ayrshire were centres of Communist strength. Abe Moffat held the NUM Presidency until 1961 when his brother Alex took over. The succession then passed to Mick McGahey and George Bolton, keeping the position for the Party until the 1980s. Because the Communists were also strong in other parts of Scottish industry – the shipyards of Glasgow, Dundee, and Aberdeen and the engineering plants of Glasgow included – the Scottish TUC became 'a vital conduit for the Party's influence'.<sup>79</sup> Jimmy Milne chaired the congress in 1960 and was eventually elected STUC Assistant Secretary, before taking the top job in the 1970s. The Party's medium term perspective was to achieve in Britain what it already had in Scottish trade unionism. The NUM was an obvious stepping stone but could not be won for a 'progressive' policy in the 1950s. The NUGMW was similarly arid until its short-lived support for unilateral nuclear disarmament in 1959. The AEU, by contrast, was a more fertile source of political resolutions supporting left-wing causes, a fact which reflected its factionalised character and the Communists' ability to capture positions of influence, including at least two seats on the Executive. Here Bevanite policies were supported, as well as the Party's standard motions on east-west trade and defence cuts. The same was true of the NUR's small annual general meeting. But in USDAW the Party was beaten back from commanding positions in the 1940s as its opponents, morally strengthened by Communist repression in eastern Europe, organised an anti-Communist electoral machine within the union to rival the Party's. Bevanite policies gained majority support in USDAW during the early

1950s but the conference roundly condemned the Communist Party in 1956, 1957 and 1958 and demonstrated little enthusiasm for the stock left-wing causes of the later years of the decade. Even in the ETU, which was controlled by a Communist faction, there were limits on what the Executive could achieve by way of support for the Party's policies. Where they overlapped with the Bevanite positions, support from the annual conference was generally forthcoming for left-wing resolutions. But the leadership was quickly repudiated when it affiliated the union to the British Peace Committee, and compelled to withdraw. Similarly, attempts to pass resolutions that would allow Communists to represent the union at Labour conferences were rejected in 1952 and 1953, though a general appeal for the lifting of the bans and proscriptions succeeded in 1956.

The Communists took the optimistic view that there would always be a left in the Labour Party because the struggle of right and left policies was inherent in the very structure of an organisation based – as Labour was – on mass working-class organisations such as the unions, but led by an alliance of trade union bureaucrats and petty bourgeois reformists. The task was therefore to chip away at right-wing oligarchical power, while perfecting the union electoral machines that would enable the left to occupy the seats of power. The Labour left in the unions was undoubtedly far more accessible to the Communists than its counterpart in the constituency labour parties or the Labour left in Parliament, which was generally distant and unreliable. The Bevanite challenge to the Labour leadership in any case faded when Bevan took over the position of Treasurer in October 1956 and became opposition spokesman on colonial, and later foreign, affairs – emerging as an opponent of unilateral nuclear disarmament in 1957. The Party itself took Bevan's side of the argument on this issue as we have already observed – with the unions under Communist leadership demonstrating their opposition to unilateralism at the 1957 Labour conference. Bevan, however, was no longer a focal point for the amorphous Labour left. In a way the very fact that Labour lefts came and went – Clydesiders, the ILP's 'Socialism in Our Time' initiative, the Cook-Maxton Manifesto, the Socialist League, Keep Left, the Bevanites, Victory for Socialism – all this pointed to the Labour left's character as 'a trend, a mood, an aspiration, of a multiplicity of individuals and policies, awaiting ruefully the permanent defeat which is the destiny of all spontaneous unorganised movements in the face of organisation'. In short, it pointed to the need for a Party of united strength, common leadership, policy, organisation and action – the Communist Party.<sup>80</sup> In this view it was inevitable that the Communist Party would come more into the centre of the picture as the Bevanite challenge disintegrated and a 'visible demobilisation' or individual dispersal overcame the forces associated with it. The Communists had created 'an indestructible base in the industrial working class', as various denunciations of

the Communists testified in the course of 1959, ranging from newspaper attacks on the ETU, to reports of the National Union of Manufacturers and various Court of Enquiry Reports exposing the 'largely communist-inspired' shop stewards movement.

It was not altogether unrealistic to imagine a strong left making its presence felt through the trade unions. Frank Cousins replaced Jock Tiffin as leader of the TGWU in May 1956 and was now emerging as a better prospect to lead the left than anyone in the PLP. Unlike Bevan, Cousins had hundreds of thousands of votes to wield in the battle with the right over the next several years, a time when the Labour Party was divided over nationalisation, clause four and unilateralism. The Gaitskellite campaign to make Labour electable was given urgency and impetus by the party's third consecutive general election defeat at the very time when unilateralist resolutions were carried at the congresses of the GMU and TGWU. In 1960 the conferences of the AEU, NUR, and USDAW went the same way and the scene was set for Gaitskell's defeat on this issue. In fact Labour's annual conference also witnessed his retreat over the deletion of Clause Four. The Communists – only recently converted to unilateralism – later proclaimed it 'the highest point of advance of the Labour left for a generation'.<sup>81</sup> The real issue now was to build a broadly-based political left inside the unions and the Labour Party, but it was far from obvious that the Communist Party had either the numbers or the vision to play the leading role in bringing it about.

The Political Resolution and Report to the 26th Congress of the Party in 1961 produced the fullest Communist analysis of Labour thus far but reproduced in all essentials the old arguments which rooted right-wing dominance in the illusions fed by imperialism, coupled with leadership control over the party machine, thanks to formal supports to oligarchy such as the bans and proscriptions against the left. This remained the Party's position throughout the period considered here.<sup>82</sup> Just twelve months after Labour's belated return to office the Communists reminded everyone who cared to know that:

the reformist right-wing leaders in Britain have abandoned the aim of socialism and seek to eliminate it as the aim of the Labour movement. Thus they seek to continue the attempt to eliminate the ideas of the class struggle and of working-class power as having any relevance to the struggle for socialism. Their whole aim is to tie the workers to the capitalist system.<sup>83</sup>

Gaitskell's attempt to ditch Clause Four of the Labour Party constitution in 1959-60 was simply recent empirical evidence of this old fact. Another indicator was provided by 'the main policies pursued by the [current] Labour Government' led by Harold Wilson. It was already clear to the Communists in 1965 that the Labour Government

... continued the policies of its Tory predecessors on all major questions – arms expenditure, incomes policy, budget attacks on the people, support for US imperialist aggression in Vietnam, the Dominican Republic and other places, support for the anti-Soviet cold war, military blocs, NATO, SEATO, support for re-arming West Germany, etc ... This Government was foremost in calling on the workers to make sacrifices in 'the interests of the country' and in presenting its policies as applying to all – capitalists and workers alike.

The Party's *Economic Report* of January 1958 commented that throughout the period since the war 'the fight against inflation on the part of the Government expressed itself in the main as a fight against wage increases, all the real factors promoting inflation being ignored'.<sup>84</sup> By the Party's reckoning male wage rates were 52 per cent above those of 1947 in December 1955, while the retail price index was 54 per cent higher than the 1947 figure. A new retail price index began in January 1956 since which time wages had risen faster than prices, but no faster than productivity. It was Government policy, in the Communist view, to continue the credit squeeze begun in 1957 and 'to create sufficient unemployment to restrain the wages movement'. The 'attack on working class living standards' had to be repelled 'and conditions created for a speedy working class advance by developing the wages movement and the movement for the forty-hour week'. In fighting against the developing crisis it was 'at the same time essential to realise that it is impossible to solve all problems within a capitalist society'. Yet unemployment in 1957 was only 1.2 per cent of the working population, or 265,000. An apparent crisis level was not reached until February 1963 when it reached 933,000 but this was more than halved to 402,000 in February 1965, falling to 344,000 by October of that year. The Communists nevertheless continued to see nervous governments continually talking about the need for wage restraint – the Council on Prices, Productivity and Incomes being succeeded by Selwyn Lloyd's National Incomes Commission in 1962 – while annual price rises reached over 4 per cent by 1964. Wages in the UK, according the Party, had 'lagged behind those in other leading capitalist countries during the period 1960-64 with the single exception of the USA'.<sup>85</sup> George Brown's White Paper of 1965 – Prices and Incomes Policy – was only the most recent of 'many indications of indecent haste' provided by the Labour Government which testified to its anxiety 'to destroy free collective bargaining'. In 1966 the Party's Economics Committee accordingly advised that 'what needs to be emphasised in our view is that the battle round the question of wages and salaries has only just begun'.<sup>86</sup>

The Communists had always maintained that the roots of the UK's repeated crises lay in the imperialist character of its economy and the burdens placed on it by the continuation of imperialist policies. The balance of payments crisis of 1964 was but the most recent manifesta-

tion of this problem.<sup>87</sup> The three chief causes of the imbalance were the familiar problems of overseas military expenditure, the net export of long-term capital and the widening gap between exports and imports – with the latter amounting to an ‘essential feature of the parasitical imperialist economy’.<sup>88</sup> The Labour Government’s attempt to break out of the Stop-Go cycle was declared a failure within twelve months of the Government’s formation. Yet the higher rates of economic growth that should have been achieved were to have been the basis of the continuation of Britain’s world role in finance and diplomacy while enabling the Government to finance social improvements and resolve distributional issues without the cost of class conflict. Labour was seen to have opted for a continuation of the world role instead of economic growth. This option involved ‘pretensions’ and illusions as well as a logic predetermined by the nature of the UK economy. The choice was made at the expense of greater financial dependency on the USA and conflict at home with organised labour – the inevitable result of the Government’s need to hold down living standards. The PLP voted 225 to 54 in favour of maintaining British troops East of Suez in June 1966 and Frank Cousins resigned from the Government in July in protest at the coming wage freeze. There was a neat symmetry here for the Communists. In their view the incomes policy always had been linked to the shoring up of imperialism and it had been predicted at the beginning of 1965 that the Government would be forced to seek out ‘more and more drastic action in order to impose its 3-3.5 per cent norm ... The struggle will therefore become more acute in 1966 to prevent the trade unions and the working people being shackled to the incomes policy’. By the beginning of that year it was already clear that ‘the whole programme presented by the Labour Party at the General Election has been radically changed’. The economy was being slowed down, social reforms were dropped or cut back. It was a new crisis of sterling in July 1966 which led the Government to add an entirely new part to its Prices and Incomes Act making provision for a ‘standstill’ in wage rises for the six months up to December, followed by severe restraint in the first half of 1967.

The Party argued that the ‘broadest alliance of all progressive people’ was needed to get an alternative approach. This would cut military expenditures, ‘put a complete stop on the export of private capital’, introduce import quota controls, freeze rents, abandon legislative plans to control trade unions, improve social services, nationalise steel as the first shot in a campaign against Britain’s monopolies, and increase state control over production and investment in the export industries.<sup>89</sup> J. R. Campbell, reflecting on the local election results that summer, referred to the alienation of the Labour activists in the unions and the constituency parties, people who had been left ‘in a moral and theoretical void’ by their leaders. The Party was ready to prepare a ‘fight for an immediate reflation of the economy’ and for the restoration of ‘free

collective bargaining'. Campbell's references to the need for alternative policies in respect of capital controls, import controls, defence cuts, public expenditure and economic planning only served to illustrate how rudimentary the alternative programme still was.<sup>90</sup> The more immediate fight that was actually being prepared was the one that would restore 'free collective bargaining'. Though the TUC upheld the wage freeze in September 1966 by 5 million to 3.9 million votes, wage restraint was rejected a year later without a division. The Brighton TUC also condemned the Government's deliberate 'creation' of unemployment and Communist observers stressed the emergence of a 'consistent alternative policy'.<sup>91</sup> Congress had called for a 'drastic reduction' of military expenditure, something that would require 'a complete reversal of the global imperialist policy' if it were implemented, according to Dutt. It also demanded controls on the import and export of capital and wanted national economic planning to maintain full employment. The TUC also called for an 'extension of public ownership' to those monopolies 'on which the country's economy is becoming increasingly dependent', in order to make a national plan for the real improvement of living standards effective. These were the perennial Communist demands which many speakers at the 1965 TUC had raised to no effect.

In 1965 it had also been possible to defend the Government's policy on Vietnam. But the mood had shifted. A resolution moved at the 1967 TUC on behalf of the Draughtsmen by J. E. Mortimer (a contributor to *Labour Monthly*) and carried by 4.7 to 3.3 million votes called on the Government to disassociate itself from American policy in Vietnam. This was a sign of what was to come at the annual conference of the Labour Party in October. More evidence of the growth of the sort of broad-based leftism favoured by the Communists was provided by a resolution at the Brighton TUC demanding an extension of legislation against racial discrimination in housing and employment, though this was blocked by a procedural manoeuvre – the one black mark on the congress according to Dutt, and evidence of the survival of 'powerful reactionary trends in right-wing trade union circles'. The election of Hugh Scanlon as President of the Amalgamated Engineering Union in November 1967 was, however, greeted as further evidence of the strengthening of the left trend in the unions. The TUC also published its first annual report on the economic situation that autumn, incorporating the General Council's increasingly militant ideas on what ought to be done to effectively manage the UK economy. But there were countervailing forces including a proposal for annual conferences of the Trade Union Executives at which, conceivably, corporatist attempts to fix wage norms could be worked out with representatives of the Government and collaboration with the employers might be strengthened. The increasingly unruly TUC could then be bypassed – an outcome the Communists would resist as fiercely as they would block any tamper-

ing with 'free collective bargaining'.<sup>92</sup> The Party emphasised the extent to which the unions were estranged from the Labour Government. It played on their sense of exclusion and stressed the Government's contempt for them. Finance capital was determined to solve its problems at the workers' expense, and the Communists forecast (once again) the return of the reserve army of the unemployed.<sup>93</sup> The necessary reversal of 'the whole direction of policy in Britain' was in their view 'bound up with the immediate urgent fight against the ... devaluation-deflation offensive on the standards of the people'. This was the familiar refrain of the previous decade and a half but now 'the militant forces in the unions' and 'the left currents in the Labour Party', even those in Parliament, were 'more widespread and outspoken than in any recent period'. The broad front of co-operation desired by the Communists was closer to realisation than ever before.

## NOTES

1. See J. Callaghan, 'Towards Isolation: The Communist Party and the Labour Government', in J. Fyfth (ed.), *Labour's Promised Land?: Culture and Society in Labour Britain, 1945-51*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1995, pp88-100.
2. *Labour Monthly*, October 1951, p449.
3. R. P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly*, October 1951, pp457-58.
4. Reproduced in the *Economist*, April 1950.
5. Beveridge is quoted as saying that rising prices 'have made social insurance benefits insufficient for subsistence even at the bare minimum assumed in the Beveridge Report'. *The Times*, 9 November 1953.
6. P. Kerrigan, 'Trade Unionism in 1953', *Labour Monthly*, January 1953, p13.
7. Dutt, 'Labour, Mr. Bevan and Britain's Future', *Labour Monthly*, May 1952, p196.
8. J. Gollan, 'The New Fabians', *Labour Monthly*, August 1952, p338.
9. R. Bellamy, 'Mr. Strachey's Guide to Contemporary Capitalism', *Marxist Quarterly*, January 1957, pp21-30. Sam Aaronovitch's *The Ruling Class*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1961 also attacked the 'soulful corporation' thesis but failed to convince in its larger ambition as an account of monopoly capitalism in the UK.
10. Austen Albu, the chairman of the Fabian Society, argued in 1954 that 'there is general agreement that equality of income has been pushed nearly as far as is compatible with incentive'. See *New Statesman*, 16 January 1954, p68, and his letter to the journal the following week (p99).
11. Sancho Panza (Salme Dutt), 'The New "Socialism"', and 'Social Structure of Britain', *Labour Monthly*, August 1956, p362, and March 1955, pp135-9, respectively. See also J. Cohen, 'Does Capitalism Still Exist?', *World News*, 14 February 1959.
12. Editorial, *Marxism Today*, February 1967, p34.
13. Dutt, 'The New Labour Programme', *Labour Monthly*, July 1953, p289
14. Dutt, 'What is Socialism?', *Labour Monthly*, January 1960, p5.

15. Ibid., p9.
16. See J. Gollan, *The British Political System*, London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1954, pp174-5.
17. 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly*, May 1952, p199.
18. R. T. McKenzie, *British Political Parties*, London, 1955.
19. Notes of the Month, *ibid*, July 1953, p293.
20. Gollan, *The British Political System*, p173.
21. *Ibid*, p174.
22. *British Road to Socialism*, 1958, p29.
23. *The Times*, 12 October 1953.
24. *British Road* (1958), p13.
25. Pollitt, *Challenge to Labour*, political report to the 23rd National Congress of the Communist Party, CPGB, London, 1954, p5.
26. *Ibid*, pp24-25.
27. *Ibid*, p37.
28. P. Kerrigan, 'The Communist Party in the Industrial Struggle', *Marxism Today*, December 1970, p375.
29. Pollitt, *Challenge to Labour*, p45.
30. Dutt, 'Leadership and Policy in Britain', *Labour Monthly*, February 1956, p51.
31. *New Statesman*, 13 February 1954, p193.
32. *Ibid*, p61.
33. E. P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1955, p760.
34. *Tribune*, 7 July 1950, editorial and p4.
35. An unsigned piece by Deutscher, for example, appeared under the title 'Revolution From Above', *Tribune*, 23 February 1945. On this aspect of his work see D. Singer, 'Armed with a Pen', in D. Horowitz (ed.), *Isaac Deutscher: The Man and His Work*, MacDonald, 1971, pp40-42 and p55, fn. 16. Deutscher's most influential books expounding this view include his *Stalin*, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth 1949, second edition 1966, Ch. 14 and Postscript; *Russia After Stalin*, Cape, 1953; 'A Reply to Critics' in *Heretics and Renegades*, Cape, 1955; *The Unfinished Revolution, Russia 1917-67*, Oxford University Press, 1967.
36. A. Bevan, 'The People's Coming of Age', *Tribune* 3 February 1950, pp3-4.
37. 'A Reply to Critics', p197.
38. Thus Norman McKenzie's 'Bulgarian Visa', *New Statesman*, 14 August 1954, pp173-4; F. Kuh, 'Report on Poland' in the same journal 17 April 1954.
39. *Tribune*, editorial, 7 January 1955, p4.
40. *Tribune* 27 January, p4 and 24 February 1956, p1.
41. A. Bevan, *In Place of Fear*, Quartet, 1978 and 1952, p128.
42. *Tribune*, 5 August 1955, p7. The American Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions published a report on Cybernation in 1962 which *The Times* summarised on 30 January. See Dutt's 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly* March 1962, p107.
43. *Tribune*, 5 October 1956, p5.
44. See for example, Councillor E. Roberts, 'Where Do we Stand Now?', *Labour Monthly*, January 1958, pp22-9, and Renee Short, prospective Labour candidate for Watford, 'The Way Ahead', *Labour Monthly*, February 1958, pp70-75.

45. See P. Krugman, 'The Myth of Asia's Economic Miracle', *Foreign Affairs*, November-December 1994, pp62-3 and fn. p65.
46. *Tribune*, 23 October 1959.
47. *Tribune*, 24 August 1956, p12.
48. A reference to the decision to conduct a debate on Stalinism at branch level of the CPSU.
49. *Tribune*, 23 March 1956, p4.
50. *Tribune*, 6 July 1956 and 26 October 1956.
51. *Tribune*, 9 November 1956, p12.
52. For Mikardo see *Tribune*, 10 May 1957, p6; for the unsigned 'special' see *Tribune* 12 July 1957, p5 and p12.
53. *Tribune*, 9 January 1959.
54. *Guardian*, 27 June 1962, quoted by E. M. Winterton, 'Class and Parties Today', *Labour Monthly*, August 1962, p371.
55. See Bevan's preface to D. Healy, *Cards on the Table*.
56. Notes of the Month, *Labour Monthly*, May 1952, p205.
57. See P. Williams, *Hugh Gaitskell*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp206-9.
58. Gollan, report to the 23rd congress, CP/CENT/CONG/08/08.
59. Dutt, 'Guiana and Margate', *Labour Monthly*, November 1953, pp488-9.
60. Pollitt, 'Britain Arise', report to the 22nd congress, p23, CP/CENT/CONG/08/02.
61. *Backbench Diaries of Richard Crossman*, quoted by J. Graham Jones, 'Rift and Conflict Within the Labour Party in the 1950s: Letters From Aneurin Bevan', *Llafur*, 7, 2, 1997, pp31-41.
62. See, for example, J. Gollan, 'The Labour Party and the Election', *Labour Monthly*, May 1955, pp213-19.
63. See R.H.S. Crossman, 'Thoughts on Socialist-Communist Relations', *Labour Monthly*, October 1956, pp448-51. Though evidently written before the Russian invasion of Hungary, the most Crossman can contemplate is that individual socialists and communists could talk to each other.
64. Cole's International Society for Socialist Studies declared at its inaugural meeting in Paris in April 1956 that it was time for 'a reassessment of world communism' in the wake of the Khruschev reforms. See *Tribune*, 6 April 1956. Cole took the unfashionable, but logical, view that Communists and Socialists had much in common.
65. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly*, July 1956, p301.
66. F. Foster, 'Both Parties Must Change!', *World News*, 14 July 1956, p439.
67. *World News*, 9 June 1956.
68. Thus Alf Robens and Walter Padley attacked the Communists at USDAW's conference in April (*The Times*, 4 April); Ernest Jones, President of the miners' union attacked Arthur Horner's Communist affiliations; a miners' union branch at Hatfield near Doncaster took the occasion to write to Khruschev expressing 'abhorrence' at the Soviet invasion of Hungary (*The Times*, 19 November); and so on.
69. J. Mahon, 'Communist-Labour Unity after the Election', *World News and Views*, 1 December 1951, p519.
70. P. Kerrigan, 'Trade Unions and Amalgamation', *Marxism Today*, June 1964, pp166-70.
71. This was the ploy, for example, of Charles Geddes, General Secretary of the generally conformist Union of Post Office Workers (and TUC

- President in 1954) as well as his successor Ron Smith. See A. Clinton, *Post Office Workers: A Trade Union and Social History*, Allen and Unwin, London 1984, pp409-11 and 420-21.
72. P. S. Bagwell, *The Railwaymen: The History of the NUR Volume 2: Beeching and After*, Allen and Unwin, London 1982, pp84-5.
  73. Greene is described as a 'pathological' opponent of the Communists in *ibid*, p92.
  74. Thus in 1953, 203 resolutions were put forward on China and Korea and 48 on East-West trade in the course of the year's trade union conferences. See 'Reports from the Districts', *World News and Views*, 21 November 1953.
  75. R. Bean, 'Militancy, Policy Formation and Membership Opposition in the ETU', *Political Quarterly*, volume 36, 1965, pp181-90.
  76. P. Kerrigan, 'The Union Conferences', *World News and Views*, 20 June 1953, pp293-4.
  77. *World News and Views* generally, but see 'The Engineers' Wage Claim' (20.6.53), denouncing the cost of living index and productivity deals, 'The Port Workers' Wage Claim' (18 July 1953), denouncing the inflationary corrosion of real incomes and the use of mechanisation to increase exploitation while advocating shop steward led militancy, and 'Britain's Steel Industry' (10, October 1953) which reiterates these arguments. These are the recurring themes of the whole period. See *Labour Research*, *passim*.
  78. Quoted in M. Harrison, *Trade Unions and the Labour Party Since 1945*, Allen and Unwin, London 1960, p40.
  79. W. Thompson, 'Communist Party influence in the Scottish Labour Movement during the 1960s', Communist Party biographical project conference, Manchester, Easter 2001.
  80. Dutt, 'Communism and the Left', *Labour Monthly*, April 1959, pp145-53.
  81. CPGB, *The Role of the Communist Party*, CPGB, London 1965, p13.
  82. Indeed it was the basis of Communist analysis well beyond 1968. See D. Priscott, 'The Communist Party and the Labour Party', *Marxism Today*, January 1974, pp5-15.
  83. *Role of the Communist Party*, p8.
  84. *World News*, 25 January 1958, p56.
  85. Annual Report of the Economic Committee, January 1966, p11, CP/CENT/ECON/5/6
  86. *Ibid*, p11.
  87. Annual Report, January 1965, CP/CENT/ECON/5/7.
  88. Annual Report, January 1966, p2.
  89. Annual Report, 1966, pp15-17. Similar conclusions were reiterated in 'Labour Economic Policy in Theory and Practice', October 1966, another of the Economic Committee's briefing papers.
  90. J. R. Campbell, 'When Will They Ever Learn?', *Labour Monthly*, June 1967, pp259-63.
  91. 'From Brighton to Scarborough', *Labour Monthly*, October 1967, p436.
  92. D. Bowman, 'Trade Union Executives and Wages', *Labour Monthly*, March 1967, pp109-112.
  93. Dutt, 'A Call to Battle', *Labour Monthly*, December 1967, p537.

## 8. The Trade Unions

### THE CONTEXT

If the big picture suggested that the Party's political influence could grow through the industrial struggle, the detail on the ground exposed the true complexity of the situation. The Party was simply absent from many regions and industries and its presence was patchy in the centres of its strength. It was also forced to grapple with significant variations in the structural conditions of the industries where it sought to be relevant. Though the period looked at here was one of unprecedented economic growth and full employment, the opportunities for exploiting this situation were far from straightforward, even had the Communists fully recognised its novelty. In mining, for example, a system of compulsory arbitration held sway which rendered all strikes technically in breach of procedures until the system was changed in 1961.<sup>1</sup> Until the National Power Loading Agreement came into force in 1966, grievances often centred around piece-rates and a high level of typically brief unofficial disputes characterised the coalfields of Scotland, Wales, and Yorkshire. But these areas accounted for around 80 per cent of strikes and other coalfields were virtually strike-free. Between 1947 and 1963 the workforce fell from 700,000 to 520,000 and after 1957 the industry was in serious decline. For all the Communist presence on the Scottish and Welsh coalfields, miners' earnings fell in relative terms and the NUM leadership was able to enjoy friendly relations with the National Coal Board and its eight divisional sections. No national strike had occurred since 1926. The Communists reasoned that the growing Yorkshire coalfield held the key to the balance of power within the union and set out to win the area in the early 1950s, but it was tough going.

Employment in engineering, by contrast, expanded throughout the years covered here but there was no national strike over pay until 1957. The industry was complex, diverse and fragmented and yet the unions were faced with 'one of the most formalised, centralised, and authoritarian procedures for settling industrial disputes' in existence. Before 1957 most disputes were about the rules governing the workplace and though the general conditions of sustained full employment ultimately promoted the growth of shop steward numbers and influence the

union's lay officials began the period with only an insecure presence in the workshops.<sup>2</sup> Shop steward power became evident by the mid-50s, and during the brief national strike of 1957 Communists were conspicuous on the district committees which supervised local organisation of the dispute. Communists also opposed the decision to call off the strike on 2 April, by which time some state officials were worried by 'a growing realisation of the extent to which Communist trouble-makers were voicing the clamour for ... "class struggle".'<sup>3</sup> But the union was highly factionalised and it was not until the mid-60s that the sort of electoral collaboration between Communists and others on the Left that had been common in the Manchester district since the 1940s was adopted nationally. In Sheffield, which I discuss below, the Communists were more isolated and harassed, as they were in London engineering.

Dock labour was another occupation where a conflict of interests between the union leadership and the rank and file offered opportunities for the Communist Party. The post-war explosion of trade ensured that the 70,000 dockers in the Transport Union (TGWU) had a strong negotiating hand but it was one that the union's leadership under Arthur Deakin was unwilling to play. Grievances thus centred around long hours and wage levels that bore no relation to the men's market position, as well as the gang-based piecework system that dictated the pace of work. Though the disputes of 1949 and 1951 were highly politicised – especially in the eyes of the authorities – the unofficial leadership which developed in dockland was 'industrially militant rather than politically radical'.<sup>4</sup> This situation presented limited opportunities for the Communists, partly because they had been banned from holding office in the TGWU in 1949. The Party's response was to fight the ban from within the union and discredit the leadership which had brought it about. But as we saw in chapter one the Communist presence on the docks was not great and most of what it could muster was confined to the Port of London, where it had militants such as Ted Dickens, Ted Kirby, Vic Marney and Jack Dash – some of the 'trouble-makers' singled out for expulsion or suspension from the TGWU in 1949. The Communists opposed the great strikes of 1954-55 and the related exodus to the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers Union (NASD). It lost some influence in the wake of this dispute and also found that it had to contend with Trotskyist rivals like Harry Constable, some of whom belonged to the NASD.

### COLD WAR IN THE UNIONS

The party's trade union strongholds had grown stronger during the Second World War and by 1945 particular factories had the sort of membership that was consistent with the organisation's original self-image. Napier's in Acton Vale, nicknamed the Red Putilov, had 200 members, amongst which were included some of the foremen; at Austin Aero, which employed 15,000 people at the height of the war effort,

there were 400 Party members and pre-paid sales of the *Daily Worker* reached 1,000, while the shop stewards' paper for engineering, *New Propellor*, sold 2-3,000 copies out of a national circulation of 94,000; the Metro-Vickers plant at Trafford Park boasted 250 Party members in a workforce of 30,000 compared to a pre-war membership of 10 from a workforce of around 16,000.<sup>5</sup> Fairey Aviation in Stockport supported a Communist Factory Group of 280 members. Similar 'factory fortresses' were to be found at Rolls Royce in Derby, Ford Dagenham, English Steel in Sheffield, De Havilland's in Middlesex, and in the big engineering and aviation companies generally of the Midlands, north London, Manchester, Sheffield and Glasgow. Communists were prominently involved in the joint production committees, shop stewards' combine committees and trades councils. They had greatly strengthened their position within the Amalgamated Engineers' Union (AEU) in particular, in which they held two out of seven Executive seats and constituted two out of three National Organisers and three of the seven Regional Officers for the Executive Division. The Party's rank and file strength at this time can be gauged from the fact that the AEU produced the largest number of branches (557) of any trade union supporting CP affiliation to the Labour Party.<sup>6</sup>

Of course Communists held leading full-time positions within unions other than the Engineers'. Though the largest proportion of delegates with trade union credentials at the Communist Party congresses of 1942-45 belonged to the AEU, the next largest group belonged to the TGWU whose 34-strong General Executive Council included nine Communists. Three more sat on the union's eight-member Finance and General Purposes Committee – Muriel Edwards (EMI), Bert Papworth (London buses) and Sam Henderson (Glasgow trams). Papworth also became the first Party member to be elected to the TUC General Council in 1944. He represented an organisation that controlled 13-15 per cent of the vote at the Labour and TUC conferences. But the Communist advance in the TGWU came to an abrupt halt in 1949 when Party members were banned from holding full-time and lay offices of the union. In the summer of that year the Labour Government also took severe action to break the strike of London dockworkers. Military force and emergency powers were invoked when solidarity action – in support of the Communist-led Canadian Seamen's Union – spread through the ports of London, Avonmouth, Bristol and Liverpool. The Government was informed that the Communists were involved at each port and, given the Party's opposition to the Marshall Plan, it was easy to see these disputes as part of an international pattern of Moscow-inspired sabotage. Attlee himself made broadcasts denouncing the work of Communist agitators. Given that the TGWU vote was decisive in around one-quarter of the card votes taken during the years 1945-58,<sup>7</sup> it is easy to see why it was agreeable to many people that Communists were debarred from holding office in the

union. When Pollitt criticised the TGWU leadership in 1950, its general secretary, Arthur Deakin, replied by calling upon the Government to ban the Communist Party entirely. Deakin knew that in some unions the Communists were too entrenched in the leadership to be levered out as they had been in the TGWU. In the Electricians' union they appeared to exercise a vice-like grip on the organisation, a process that began in the 1930s but only became conspicuous in 1948 when the anti-Communist general secretary of the ETU, Ernest Bussey, was replaced by Walter Stevens, a Party member who was as popular as he was administratively skilful. It was the only significant industrial union which the Communists 'controlled' in the 1950s but the Party had reasons to believe that there was plenty of scope to repeat this success in key sectors such as mining. In 1946 Arthur Horner was elected general secretary of the NUM and by the beginning of the next decade Communists led the miners in Scotland and Wales and four more sat on the union's executive. The President of the Building Workers Union was also a Communist and there were Communists on the union's regional councils. The Party was also strong in the leaderships of the FBU, the Foundry Workers, the Musicians' Union, the Scientific Workers, Clerical Workers, Tobacco Workers, the Association of Cinematograph Technicians, the Furniture Trade Operatives and the Bakers, Confectioners and Allied Workers.

The Labour Government and the TUC took co-ordinated measures against the Communists to meet the anticipated campaign of Communist industrial sabotage signalled by Stalin's rejection of the Marshall Plan. Vic Feather, the TUC's Assistant Secretary immediately produced anti-Communist propaganda depicting the Party as a threat to democracy and received confidential briefings from the Government's secret Information Research Department, while later working alongside anti-Communist organisations such as Common Cause and its Industrial Research and Information Services.<sup>8</sup> Feather was also the main figure in the TUC's campaign against Communists in the Trade Councils. Communist influence over rank and file trade unionists was at least as troubling as the Party's prominent supporters on the union executives.

The TUC thus intervened directly in 1949 to uphold the 1934 Black Circulars banning Communists from attending as delegates to trades councils, on the pretext of defending democracy. These measures had been suspended at the 1942 TUC but their revival was not entirely surprising – the danger of renewed suppression had already been signalled at the end of 1947 when the Labour general secretary Morgan Phillips notified all affiliated organisations to prepare for the campaign against the Marshall Plan.<sup>9</sup> When the TUC agreed to support Stafford Cripps' wage freeze in March 1948 the way was clear for Communists to lead the rank and file 'conspiracy' to break the agreement. The Cold War in the unions had begun and by the end of the year the TUC

International Department called upon the European trade unions to 'counteract the activities of the Communists wherever they may be found'. Dagenham trades council thus lost TUC backing in 1949 because of Communist leadership and others followed until with the expulsion of Glasgow and London Trades Councils in 1952, 27 of the 50 affiliated trades councils were no longer linked to the TUC. Many had had their registration withdrawn on the grounds that they had failed to support TUC policy, promoted disruptive propaganda and collaborated with the Communist Party in organising demonstrations. Others were set up to replace the disbanded trades councils, once the Communists were excluded.

The Party had been placed on the defensive in respect of its democratic and labour movement *bona fides* ever since the autumn of 1947. It repeatedly stressed that its members behaved as exemplary trades unionists and it suited its purposes to claim that the militant struggle against Communists in the unions was confined to a minority of unrepresentative activists and ideologues. Such people undoubtedly existed. They included Catholics such as John Byrne in the ETU (in which Catholic Action was active), disillusioned Communists such as Billy Stokes in the Coventry AEU<sup>10</sup> and TUC officials with American Embassy contacts such as the general secretary Vincent Tewson, assistant secretary Vic Feather, and Herbert Tracey. The latter group, in the Communist view, had been verbally whipped into line by the Americans. But while it was true that many trade unionists were not interested in the anti-Communist crusade and sometimes actively rejected it,<sup>11</sup> former Party members and sympathisers were continuously added to the lists of strong anti-Communists after each of the successive outrages committed by the Stalin dictatorship. Some of the disillusioned happened to be in positions to make their disillusion count – Jack Tanner (AEU President 1939–54) and Will Lawther (NUM President) were added to the list in 1948; Les Cannon and Frank Chapple (ETU) in 1956. Even the rank and file branch activists were known to ask for TUC guidance on how best to combat the Party.<sup>12</sup>

In 1952 Common Cause was launched to bring trade union anti-Communists together. It had the support of trade union officials such as Feather, Tom O'Brien, Cecil Hallet (AEU), and Florence Hancock (TGWU) and published *Common Cause*. Feather used the organisation to channel anti-Communist propaganda to the union branches. He wrote several more exposés himself including *How Do the Communists Work?* (1953) and paid particular attention, as he always had done, to Communist domination of the trades councils. He continued to receive confidential briefings on Communists within the labour movement from the Information Research Department. These activities should not be given exaggerated significance. Many trade unionists rejected the 'witch-hunt' – Feather was notably unsuccessful, for example, in persuading the West Yorkshire Federation of Trades Councils to banish Bert Ramelson

from its executive. A far more effective weapon against the Party was the huge block vote that stifled the vast majority of resolutions with an obvious Communist (pro-Soviet) connection at the TUC congress. Another was the huge working-class vote commanded by the Labour Party. It was true of course that the actual scale of the 'Communist threat' did little to protect the CPUSA from the special nostrums of the anti-Communist fanatics in America. But in Britain the fear of Communism did not take off in the McCarthy-approved manner.

The Party could be frozen-out to an extraordinary degree, however. Crick reports that: 'When a Communist member of the Yorkshire NUM Area Council put forward a motion in the late 1950s simply proposing support for the nurses in their demands for higher pay, he couldn't even find a seconder from more than a hundred other delegates'.<sup>13</sup> This sort of thing was a constant reminder in the 1950s that the Party's influence was severely restricted, but it also convinced it that the expansion of its influence depended on breaking the Right-wing oligarchies and perfecting its own electoral machine within the unions in order to bring this about. The promotion of militant trade unionism could help this project by deepening and broadening the Party's base among the rank and file. But so could better organisation and wire-pulling within the leadership structures. Danger would arise if either of these approaches advanced too quickly ahead of the other. Communist leadership in a union could make it easier to get the Party's political positions through annual conference, as in the ETU. But this could also provoke rank and file rebellions if the leadership ran too fast ahead of the membership. The ETU was not the only union affected by this problem. A rebellion inside the FBU in 1951 – where the Communists were also much more effective at obtaining leadership positions than in building up a strong rank and file base – terminated the unions' affiliation to various Party fronts and friendship societies. Thereafter the chastened leadership returned to a greater focus on wage militancy, though we saw in chapter two that John Horner, its Communist president, resigned from the Party in 1956 shortly after FBU members complained about the hypocrisy of Communist demands for a general strike during the Suez crisis while giving support for the Russian invasion of Hungary. Within the TUC it was not until Frank Cousins's election to the general secretaryship of the TGWU in 1956 that the sort of tough-minded Labour socialist with whom the Communists hoped to build durable alliances emerged to challenge the political dominance of the Gaitskell-supporting Right and Centre.

Communists continued to command the respect of their workmates on the shop floor in the 1950s on account of their sheer commitment to the daily round of trade union work. They were often simply the most indefatigable organisers and negotiators and they chose to fight on issues which commanded widespread support – higher pay, better working conditions, stronger and more militant unions.<sup>14</sup> At the rank

and file level Party members formed shop stewards' combines, linking the scattered factories of particular firms to co-ordinate campaigns and keep each other informed.<sup>15</sup> They virtually ran certain trades councils in the late 1940s and early 1950s (until the TUC's intervention) such as those in Manchester and Salford, Glasgow, Birmingham, Sheffield, and parts of London such as St Pancras. They dominated certain districts of particular unions such as the Sheffield and North London areas of the AEU. It was not necessarily in the Party's interest to openly monopolise such bodies, however, since part of its strategy was to gain influence throughout the labour movement, and that required willing co-workers who were not in the Party. It was helpful if Party members occupied key positions of course, and considerable effort was expended to bring this about. But it was necessary to do this in a way that would avoid the alienation of outsiders. The periodic exposure of secret caucusing kept threatening to destabilise this precarious balancing act. In fact the Party's conspiratorial instincts may have been reinforced by the Cold War climate, though it was a central charge of anti-Communist propaganda that Communism was inherently an 'organised conspiracy', a 'secret battalion' – whatever the political context. There was always the danger in these Cold War circumstances, however, that public disclosure of a real conspiracy inside the unions would expose the Party to more damage and systematic persecution than had yet befallen it.

It was a convenient simplification to depict Communist trade unionists as politically motivated robots under the central direction of King Street. The Party itself worried that some of its industrial militants were interested in nothing other than trade unionism while, at the other extreme, there were those in the Party with sectarian tendencies who emphasised and gloried in the ideological gulf that separated them from the merely reformist trade unionists. Of these two extremes, the Party's general political orientation dictated that militant trade unionism was the more common preoccupation of Communists in the unions. More often than not Communist lay officials were so useful to the union that non-Communist militants were thankful they existed, even in organisations that had formally banned them such as the NUGMW, the CAWU, the Boot and Shoe Operatives and even Deakin's TGWU. One of the reasons why Communists survived as lay officials in the TGWU and as leaders of unofficial actions in the years 1949-55 was, as we have seen, that the Deakin leadership refused to take advantage of the prevailing tight labour markets. Different sections of the Transport Union membership were not only held back from winning bigger wage increases, they were also exposed to compulsory overwork. This was particularly true of the dockers and busmen. There was therefore a felt need for militant rank and file leadership over pay and conditions and this was something which the Communists were ready to satisfy.

Some Party members dealt with the TGWU ban by the simple expedient of denying their Communist affiliation. Deakin made life easier for

them by leaving it to regional officials to implement the ban, once the most prominent Communists had resigned from their national positions within the union. The hostility shown towards Communists must nevertheless have been unsettling. It came from all sides – not just from within the unions and the Labour Party – and the war of words was played out against a background of international tension and polarisation. The Communists in Britain were aligned with the wrong camp and constantly reminded of their treachery. Many of the members recruited during the war had already melted away by the time it had ended. The Cold War contributed to further losses but also shrank the milieu of non-Party people prepared to associate with the Communists. Under Arthur Deakin's leadership the TGWU became a major prop for the Labour politicians who disliked the Left, and a support for the policies most detested by the Communists, including the regime of 'social democratic centralism' discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>16</sup> Deakin had a long memory, like his mentor Ernest Bevin, and had accumulated numerous reasons to detest the Communists as wreckers of trade union unity since the 1920s. By the late 1940s unity had come to mean support for Deakin's policies. He was one of the leading figures in the campaign to *Defend Democracy*<sup>17</sup> which publicised the role of Communists in destroying democracy and free trade unionism in Eastern Europe, as well as depicting them as a destructive conspiracy pursuing its own agenda in the British unions. The British Communists, merely an instrument of Russian policy in the eyes of the Labour Right, were engaged in *The Tactics of Disruption* (1953), in the words of another TUC pamphlet, to discredit social democracy and weaken the British economy.

With a mounting number of crises in the background – from the Prague coup, and the Berlin airlift, to the Communist revolution in China and the Communist invasion of South Korea – the campaign against the Communists in the British trade unions sought maximum effect by focusing on the Party's secretive, undemocratic and deceitful methods. Intolerance of Communists, as we saw in the last chapter, spread to embrace dissidents who 'objectively' strengthened the Communist cause – such as the Bevanites in the Labour Party whose critique of British foreign policy fell into this category from 1951. This logic of guilt by association was intended to frighten opponents of the Labour leadership as 'trouble-makers'. But it did not always work. It is true that a most authoritarian internal regime was created within the Labour Party and certain trade unions, but there was a price to be paid. Oligarchical leadership could lose touch with rank and file sentiments as it did in the TGWU, manifested by its persistent opposition to industrial action for pay rises the employers were unprepared to concede. An example was the union's refusal to support the unofficial action against compulsory overtime which overworked dockers staged in the Port of London in 1951. In the longer run the Deakin regime resulted in something like 10,000 dockers from the ports of Manchester, Liverpool,

Birkenhead and Hull defecting from the TGWU in 1954. The union they defected to, the National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers, had just 12 members of the CP within it in 1955, six of them in Hull. The Communists, in accordance with the strategy explained in the previous chapter, actually opposed the 'split' and for once found themselves on the same side as Deakin, albeit for radically different reasons.

### SHEFFIELD

Some idea of the practical opportunities and difficulties faced by Communist militants in the unions can be gauged from a closer look at one of the Party's strongholds – Sheffield engineering. By the mid-50s there were sixteen CP factory branches established in the large engineering firms operating in Sheffield employing around 20-24,000 members of the AEU.<sup>18</sup> Communists were prominent in shop steward organisations and the Sheffield District of the AEU was often a thorn in the side of the national executive of the union. Howard Hill was the Party's industrial organiser in the city until 1965, working with Bert Ramelson, the Yorkshire District Secretary, and Bill Moore. The city was also home to dedicated Party and trade union activists like Chris Law, an AEU branch official for 40 years and holder of the union's Award of Merit and Special Award of Merit – despite the fact that under Law's leadership the Sheffield No. 9 branch rightly became known as the Red Branch. This was a branch which ignored the list of banned and proscribed organisations circulated by the AEU and TUC and openly elected delegates to conferences organised by the *Daily Worker*, the British-Soviet Friendship Society, the British-China Friendship Society, the various Peace Congresses and so on. Law himself was active in such campaigns and sustained his commitment through the years of CND, the Cuba Solidarity Campaign and the agitations against the war in Vietnam. The No 9 branch played a leading part in the famous union victory for pay rises at Ambrose Shardlow Ltd. at the very beginning of our period in 1951 when a management lock-out and threats of dismissal failed to intimidate the workforce. The Communists organised marches, sympathy strikes, mass leaflet campaigns and national agitations of trade unionists. After the management climb-down and the resulting pay award the whole episode was written-up by another local Communist, Jack Law, as an *Engineers Special* pamphlet entitled 'Victory at Shardlows'.

The Communist-dominated District Committee of the AEU was extremely active in campaigns concerned with pay, the control of overtime, and the closed shop issue but it was also active on a broad political front. It fought a running battle with the Sheffield Trades Council for greater AEU representation, after it was reconstituted on an anti-Communist basis in the early 1950s. It held public meetings with speakers such as Konni Zilliacus, Michael Foot, Harold Davies, Nye Bevan and Harold Wilson.<sup>19</sup> It put forward declarations of support

which the AEU Executive Council found obnoxious – such as support for Greek trade unionists in 1950, support for the World Peace Committee, resolutions demanding an end to the Korean War, opposition to German rearmament, support for China's representation at the UN, support for the British Youth Festival at Wortley Hall in 1952, protests against hydrogen bomb tests, support for more East-West trade, opposition to the colour bar – and all the other Party-approved causes of the hour. Unsurprisingly an anti-Communist campaign in the Sheffield AEU, part of a national offensive against the 'Communist conspiracy' as the press called it, began soon after the Shardlow's episode. It was led by Lord Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, Lord Camrose's *Daily Telegraph*, and Lord Kemsley's *Sheffield Star*, together with IRIS, the Economic League, and Common Cause.<sup>20</sup> The anti-Communist group Moral Rearmament had also made Sheffield one of its main industrial targets focusing on shop stewards' committees. All these groups made much of the quarterly meeting of shop stewards which in March 1951 announced the beginning of a campaign to break the Government's pay freeze, starting at Shardlow's. The National Engineering Employers Federation claimed that the men's action constituted a politically-motivated plot that was contrary to union policy and asked the AEU to rescind the shop steward credentials of leading Communists such as Cyril Morton and Jack Law. By 1952 the local press was warning of 'Red Espionage at Vital Factories'. Commander R. Long, regional director of the anti-Communist Economic League, accused Communists of leaking industrial secrets to the Kremlin.<sup>21</sup> The press offensive continued with warnings that another planned conference of local shop stewards was a deliberate move to interfere with Britain's defence industry and economy. Cold War propaganda was simply intended to damage the Communists and in terms of the factional struggles between competing ideological and electoral groups within the unions it did not matter whether a specific allegation was true or false as long as it had the desired effect. Communist dependency on the Soviet Union ensured that plenty of opportunities were provided to inflict maximum damage and none was better than the crisis of 1956.

### 1956

While Nye Bevan saw reasons for optimism in Khruschev's secret speech, Hugh Gaitskell exchanged angry words with the Soviet leader about the political prisoners in Eastern Europe during Khruschev's visit to Britain in April 1956. That month Walter Padley MP told the conference of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers that the record of the CPGB was one of supporting the murder of the leaders of the Russian Revolution, slander against the Labour Government, and innumerable political somersaults which testified to its opportunism. The resulting resolution supported by the conference, however, was

more Bevanite than Gaitskellite; USDAW noted with interest the Khruschev revelations and offered the possibility of increased British co-operation with the Soviet Union if 'the Russians would repudiate the British Communist Party and the policy it had followed of recent years'.<sup>22</sup> *The Times*, dismissing the CP as 'an insect' of 'little immediate consequence' in political terms, conceded that it was 'a continual menace' industrially because 'its tactics and tirelessness yield[ed] dividends' both in times of prosperity as well as economic depression. It took the view that the full implications of this fact were often overlooked because of the organisation's 'façade of an impotent and inept political party'.<sup>23</sup> Three weeks after this article it returned to the same subject noting that the 'deplorable and obscurantist' policy adopted by the AEU conference on automation had been moved by a Communist.<sup>24</sup> It would have been happy to note that later in the year a 'highly organised and underground' group of Sheffield trade unionists, calling themselves the 'Organisation of Democrats' (also known as 'The Group') were planning an offensive within the AEU to end the CP's 'attempts to control' the union, starting with a campaign to remove Herbert Howarth from the presidency of the Sheffield District.<sup>25</sup> The attempt was unsuccessful and Howarth survived the challenge.

The Soviet invasion of Hungary had a bigger impact in loosening and weakening the Party's industrial profile. Some indication has already been given of this in previous chapters so it will suffice to confine ourselves to a number of additional observations here. First it is worth noting that resignations from the Party, especially by prominent trade union officials, were not necessarily evidence of a change of ideology. Part of their motivation for resignation may have been a desire to retain credibility and keep a job that would otherwise be imperilled. But there were also many expressions of anger within the unions at the hypocrisy of the Communists – from resolutions at conferences to threats of violence at public meetings. The council of the Nottinghamshire area of the NUM, for example, passed a resolution in November that Communists should be precluded from holding major office in the area. In industrial West Fife one quarter of the CP membership resigned, many of them helping to create the rival Fife Socialist League in February 1957.<sup>26</sup> A resolution of the Scottish miners which 'condemned the Soviet aggression in Hungary' was prevented from recording a majority only after an artful intervention by the leadership.<sup>27</sup> Alex Moffat's resignation from the Party, on the other hand (he and his brother Abe did more than most to build up the Communist presence in the Scottish NUM) may have been informed by his need to stay on the Scottish NUM's executive. Lawrence Daly certainly thought so.<sup>28</sup> Vic Feather even suggested that a small select group of long-standing CP members had been instructed to leave the Party by King Street.<sup>29</sup>

Moffat did rejoin the Party later as Feather predicted but there is no evidence of an orchestrated attempt to ride the storm and provide a later

propaganda coup, as Feather forecast, by rejoining *en bloc* at some later date. The biggest loss of Communist influence in any one union occurred in the FBU where four of the five national officials were Party members and all resigned, as did most of the Communists on the union's Executive and a number of its area officials. There was a revolt of members of the FBU against the Communist officials and it is more than likely that resignation from the Party was the only way some of them could envisage keeping their positions, but there was no later return to the fold. Bill Jones, a Party member and leader of London busmen since 1934, was one of those who did continue to work with Communists after his own resignation; even after his election to the TGWU executive in 1957 he attended *Daily Worker* rallies and was later involved in the Party-run Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions. It would be surprising if his resignation in 1956 was not at least partly a response to the TGWU ban on Communists holding office in the union, given that his position on Hungary had much in common with that of the Party leadership (believing, for example, that the 'counter-revolution' was imported).

Most of the renegades were lost for good of course. We can see this in relation to Sheffield, where the Party had strengthened its position and increased its numbers since 1951. The events of 1956 not only reduced the membership by one-quarter but led to the resignation of longstanding stalwarts, as was the pattern throughout the country. Long-standing members Arthur and Ivy Fullard wrote that 'the military intervention in Hungary [was] a murderous interference, stemming from a power-drunk Soviet leadership'.<sup>30</sup> Arthur Fullard had fought ten municipal elections as a Communist and contested a Parliamentary seat in Sheffield in 1950. The moral prestige of the Party was clearly damaged when people of this level of commitment publicly resigned. It provided an opportunity to renew the attack on Communist positions within the AEU. Before that could happen, however, an official national strike was called in engineering affecting three million men. It was called off on the casting vote of the AEU president William Carron, a notable anti-Communist and Roman Catholic. But it provided a very vivid illustration of the power of shop stewards and local militants within the union. Just hours after work resumed management at Firth Brown Tools in Sheffield decided that the time was right to break the shop stewards by dismissing sixteen union activists and effectively instituting a lock-out of all those who supported what management called 'the communist-inspired subversive elements'.<sup>31</sup> The AEU had no choice but to recognise the spontaneous walk-out in favour of the dismissed men as an official strike. Twenty days after the dispute began the management was forced to agree with the terms laid down by the District Committee of the AEU and the sacked workers were reinstated on the same conditions and rates of pay which obtained at the outset of the dispute.

The conditions pertaining in the 1950s were near-perfect for the exercise of shop steward power in engineering and by 1957 the existence of elaborate grassroots organisation was a cause for concern in the TUC as well as in the government of the day.<sup>32</sup> Full employment and tight labour markets strengthened the negotiating power of the unions; international conditions were not yet so competitive that firms were unable to pass on increased wage costs in the form of higher prices; and attempts to constrain wage increases at national level left plenty of scope for local negotiators to improve on nationally agreed wage deals. But the Communists were continuously harried by their ideological opponents within the unions. In the round of elections of December 1957 within the AEU, for example, a clear objective was to break the Communist influence on the Sheffield District Committee. The local press attacked the militants as 'Khruschev's men' and compared the local AEU organisation to the national ETU – as a Communist-rigged affair. Douglas Hyde used his column in the *Catholic Herald* to hammer home the message that the local AEU elections had wider ramifications and the AEU leadership provided buses from the factories to maximise the anti-Communist vote. Communist officials were accused of 'brainwashing' and breaking union rules on the timing of the ballot. Several local branches sent resolutions to the National Executive demanding an investigation.<sup>33</sup> On the day of the ballot Jack Tanner, a former AEU president and TUC chairman, intervened to advise stewards not to re-elect Communist officials. By this time Tanner was head of IRIS and a special northern issue of the IRIS newsletter attacking Communist activists had been distributed to around 700 shop stewards immediately prior to the elections. But of the 618 stewards entitled to attend the election meeting only 150 did so and of these nearly 70 were Communists or their supporters. The results of the District Committee elections were favourable to the Party with 18 Communists and their sympathisers elected, facing seven of their opponents. But the Communists lost the presidency and the right to chair the District Committee when Herbert Howarth was defeated by Ted Law, 1,500 votes to 1,210.<sup>34</sup>

It was the Communists who cried foul. Howarth called it the 'dirtiest' election he had ever been involved in and warned that the AEU was being run by the press, the employers and the catholic church. The Communists were in turn accused of dividing the union and encouraging religious divisions. The tone of these exchanges is captured by a comment in the local press which compared the Communists to rabbits which could be exterminated with an appropriate dose of myxomatosis.<sup>35</sup> Shop stewards at the Maltby Royal Ordnance factory issued a statement which claimed that the attack on Communists was really just an attack on trade unionism.<sup>36</sup> The battle continued into 1958. Howarth got back on to the District Committee when a fellow member of No 8 branch stood down, causing its newly-elected anti-Communist presi-

dent to storm out of his first meeting as chairman. Meanwhile in March 1958 another Communist, Harold Ulliyat (the District secretary), was suspended for a month without pay by the AEU leadership in connection with charges of rigging the District Committee elections. Bitter exchanges in the local press between Ulliyat's secretary Joan Mellors – a national executive member of the Clerical and Administrative Workers Union and vice-president of the Sheffield Trades Council (STC) – and Joe Madin, the anti-Communist president of the STC, included allegations of witch-hunts and counter-allegations of Communist plots. Mellors was eventually dismissed by the AEU, after 20 years service, provoking a call by 50 shop stewards for her reinstatement (though nothing came of it).

In 1958 the battle for control of the District Committee continued in the context of fears of growing unemployment and redundancy with the DC promoting work-share schemes, a review of piecework and talk of slowing down production unless the redundancy threats were withdrawn. Howarth fought Law for the presidency again with the local press once more reporting that many union members were 'uncomfortable' and 'angry' with the extent of the Communists' grip on the local AEU.<sup>37</sup> The Communists were defeated on this occasion and, more important, Carron, who denounced the militants as 'werewolves',<sup>38</sup> successfully stood for re-election as president in March 1959 after defeating the Communist candidate, Reg Birch, in a carefully orchestrated campaign that made use of all the usual Communist scare stories. By now the right was an organised presence in all the left-wing strongholds of the AEU – London, Manchester, Sheffield, Paisley and Birmingham. The *AEU Journal* and the *Voice of the Unions* respectively organised the right and left factions, each of which had its caucus, venues, candidates, cells, confidential reports, spies, and 'counter intelligence systems' as *The Times* put it. Elements on both sides were accused of being prepared to break the rules in order to get their preferred candidates elected.<sup>39</sup> By the time Carron was ready to retire, in 1967, the Communist Party had realised that to renew the candidature of Reg Birch was to risk splitting the left vote. Birch, who had led Carron in the first ballot of the 1956 election, rebelled against this judgement and was suspended from Party membership for three months in January 1967, on the grounds of his support for China in its dispute with the Soviet Union. The Communists meanwhile organised on behalf of a former comrade who still regarded himself as a Marxist and now belonged to the Labour Party – Hugh Scanlon, the perfect Broad Left candidate – and it was Scanlon who won.

### THE ETU CASE

No union was perceived as a greater triumph for the Communists in the 1950s than the ETU. By 1961 it was the eighth largest union in Britain with nearly one quarter of a million members. Communists entered

some of the top positions during the Second World War, and the union subsequently underwent massive expansion under a Communist leadership. Membership doubled and an ETU college was established, together with a convalescent home. With the union's expansion there was a growth in the number of official positions, which CP members tended to fill. By 1961 the ETU was expanding at the rate of 10,000 new members each year, as Frank Haxell reported during the trial which broke the Party's position in the union.

Allegations of Communist manipulation of the ETU's electoral procedures predated the Cold War. An organised Communist faction was visible in the ETU executive council elections of 1937, when Frank Haxell secured a 'huge' 1,483 votes and the new 11-man body was returned with four Communist members and 2 left-wing sympathisers.<sup>40</sup> A year later a complete unknown was able to secure 1,390 votes in the first ballot: 'the machine that could amass votes for any candidate, with or without an industrial record in the union, was born'.<sup>41</sup> Subsequent developments revealed the existence of Communist 'fraction' meetings, Communist briefings and all the circumstantial evidence one could want to suggest a Communist machine within the union. The union debated but rejected proposals to debar Communists from holding office in 1940 and 1942; the main charge was the Party's conspiratorial character. The 1943 conference witnessed a call for a 'rules revision conference' for the purpose of dealing with the CP's 'interference' in the affairs of the union. This was inspired by the action of the Marylebone branch of the CP which took it upon itself to produce a questionnaire for activists inside the ETU. Though the Party disowned the initiative some delegates to the 1943 conference argued that Communists should be debarred from holding any union office and that individual Communists should be prevented from attending delegations of the union (at the Labour conference, for example). The ETU General President at this time, H. P. Bolton, was himself in favour of the necessary rules revision, as was Ernest Bussey the general secretary. In May 1943 the rules revision conference was held and became an occasion for a bitter attack on the Communists as "Quislings" acting on behalf of the Party rather than the union. The rules revision conference duly condemned the 'interference' that had taken place and the Party was fortunate that the proposal to ban Communists from union office was dropped. The experience should have been a warning.

The Communist presence in the union became more conspicuous in 1948 when Party member Walter Stevens was elected general secretary after Bussey, his anti-Communist predecessor, retired. The formidable Communist election machine inside the union now acquired a leader of real talent, though the ETU was denied representation on the General Council as a direct result of his success – an exclusion that was maintained until 1965. Stevens extended the union's democratic machinery. The union set new propaganda standards with its support for Russian

foreign policy, pungent critiques of the USA, and messages of goodwill to prominent left-wingers such as Charlie Chaplin and Paul Robeson. Its journal *Electron* led the way in attractive design (with the help of Communist artists). Money was found to support causes close to the Communists' hearts. The union even made a feature film at the enormous cost of over £10 million. *A Power in the Land* proved a critical success and was widely distributed as a commercial 'short'. Stevens also used union money to purchase a convalescent home. The first trade union college was opened in 1953 after the purchase of Esher Place in Surrey – a 'magnificent' property, according to John Lloyd, with ruling-class connections that the Communists would have appreciated. This was also decorated with murals by Party artists working in the socialist realist style. Stevens was an attractive figure and when he was killed in a road accident in October 1954 numerous trade union leaders attended the funeral. It was, however, Harry Pollitt who gave the oration and the service ended with a rendition of the *Internationale*. His successor was Frank Haxell, a very different personality, and one who could make enemies on his own side.

But the 1943 affair had shown that the Party's opponents could be found at all levels of the organisation too. No conference was complete without a clash of the factions. The Cold War lengthened the list of these opponents even though a notable anti-Communist, Chris Blackwell, had his membership of the ETU quashed in January 1949 and his short-lived anti-Communist Democratic Association of Trade Unionists disappeared with him. In the year Frank Haxell became General Secretary, 1955, the stories of ballot rigging allegedly found their way to Peter Kerrigan and Harry Pollitt at King Street.<sup>42</sup> This is more than likely. Though Frank Haxell was a Party man, so were some of his rivals in the leadership – notably Les Cannon. There were plenty of people who could have kept Kerrigan informed of the union's sharp practices, practices that were in any case hardly confined to the Communists or to the ETU. In the event, to the opposition of Catholics such as John Byrne<sup>43</sup> in Scotland was added that of disillusioned former Communists such as Les Cannon and Frank Chapple, both of whom resigned from the Party in 1956. The events of 1956 provided a good opportunity for renewed attack on the Party though allegations of ballot rigging within the ETU appeared as early as January in the *Daily Telegraph*. The right-wing newspaper wanted to know how an estimated 200 Communists managed to secure seven of the eight national offices of the union for Party members, and six of its eleven Executive positions, and 19 of the 37 area offices. Haxell probably antagonised his enemies even more by closing down the union's Esher College as an economy measure in April 1957, making its head, Les Cannon, redundant. Cannon then fought a Communist, Jack Fraser, for a position on the Executive and lost after union officials declared that several branches which had voted for Cannon had been disqualified because of

technical infringements of the rules. The rules were said to always benefit the Communists. At the union's rules revision conference in 1955 Haxell had further centralised the union, according to his opponents, with the help of proposals formulated by the CP solicitor and member of the Party's London District Committee, Jack Gaster.<sup>44</sup>

Thereafter the ETU figured on the hit list of Cold Warriors such as Woodrow Wyatt, the former Labour MP, working with an alliance of Catholic anti-Communists, businessmen and Communist renegades inside the union. This was essentially the same alliance that was successfully put to the test in other unions. An example we have already referred to was the election for President of the AEU when Wyatt employed a Panorama programme to support Bill Carron against Reg Birch. The resulting publicity seems to have increased the turnout and massively overturned Birch's narrow lead from the first ballot. The Communist candidate for the AEU general secretaryship was also defeated. Wyatt wrote about the ETU's alleged electoral corruption for *Illustrated* magazine in 1956 and attacked the role of Communists in the union in a Panorama programme broadcast by the BBC on 9 December 1957. This managed to offend many non-Communist trade unionists as well, though Wyatt was far from deterred.<sup>45</sup> A pamphlet called *The Peril in Our Midst* singled out the ETU for special attention, and the charges against it were rehashed by Wyatt in the *New Statesman* in January 1958, forcing the union to publish *The ETU Replies to the New Statesman* (in February 1958) in which it claimed that it faced a concerted campaign led by a hostile press, the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, the Economic League, the People's League for the Defence of Freedom and Common Cause. The Fleet Street newspapers continued to publish allegations of the Communist Party's control of the ETU and in January 1959 Cannon revealed details of the Communist Party's industrial advisory committees – 'the source of their organisation, strength and power in the union[s]'. Cannon claimed that the National Advisory for the ETU – supported by eight subsidiary advisory committees based in cities such as London, Manchester, Liverpool and Southampton – was the place where for twenty years the Communists had decided on candidates, resolutions and policies. Similar details were unveiled in the *New Statesman* correspondence columns when another ex-Communist and dissident of 1956, Mark Young, revealed the inner workings of the ETU Party machine and claimed that his objections to its malpractices played a bigger role in his expulsion from the CP than his heretical views on the Soviet invasion of Hungary.<sup>46</sup>

From the end of 1958 the TUC General Council also began unsuccessfully to request full reports from the ETU on the Wyatt allegations, but events overtook it when a group of former Communists set up the ETU Reform Group, with Mark Young as Secretary and Les Cannon building the case against the union leadership. Frank Chapple, who was

heckled and booed at the ETU conference for bringing the union into public disrepute, later admitted that he passed details on from meetings of the Executive which then found their way into the press. Chapple was helped by Vic Feather, who also assisted the ETU Reform Group to spread its propaganda. Feather even wrote anonymous letters to the press on 'How to Rig a Ballot' and the like, signed 'A Trade Unionist'.<sup>47</sup> In December 1959 the conspirators were ready when Haxell had to stand for re-election as General Secretary in opposition to John Byrne, the Reform Group's candidate. When the results were declared on 7 February 1960 Haxell was declared the winner with 19,611 to 18,577 votes. But 109 branches had had their votes disqualified and in May Chapple and Byrne issued writs against the union and sixteen of its officials and members. They sought a declaration that Haxell's election was invalid and that Byrne was the new General Secretary. Cannon meanwhile prompted the former Labour MP John Freeman to suggest an interview with the ETU's Communist President Frank Foulkes on the BBC's Panorama programme. Foulkes unwisely agreed and his arguments were torn to shreds.

The Party leadership was genuinely horrified when the allegations were made about the December election. It denied that it aspired to a position of monopoly in the union; it claimed that it wanted an alliance 'of all progressive union members to increase the power, the unity, and the political clarity of the members and leaders of the union'. But its horror intensified in the months that followed. The case was taken to court and heard between 17 April and 28 June 1961. The sixteen defendants denied 'conspiracy and fraudulent practices', maintaining that they knew nothing of the ballot rigging, but they admitted that irregularities had occurred which rendered the election null and void. At the beginning of the hearing, Mr. Neil Lawson QC, counsel for the defendants, announced that the ETU conceded that Haxell's election was invalid because branch secretaries had made mistakes when returning the numbers of members entitled to vote. Having recently discovered this error the ETU agreed that a new election was necessary, but denied allegations of conspiracy and fraud. Prosecuting counsel began by observing the disproportionate number of Communists in the ETU leadership.<sup>48</sup> Not only Foulkes, the President, and Haxell the general secretary (from 1955 up to the disputed election); but also the assistant General Secretary (Bob McLennan), the office manager of the union (James Humphrey) and nine of the fourteen members of its executive council were, according to Gerald Gardiner QC, members of the Communist Party. So was the London Area President, the Secretary of its sub-committee and seven of its nine members – the London Area Number 27 being the biggest in the country. These individuals, together with other ETU Communists up and down the country, allegedly sat on committees – meeting at King Street, Farringdon Road, Karl Marx House, or elsewhere – which 'decided the policy of the Union, and

effectively controlled it'. These so-called 'Advisory Committees', said Gardiner, determined Communist strategy in the Union, selected candidates for office in the Union and agreed the means by which their election was to be procured. They were the instrument which enabled no more than 200 ETU Communists to control a union with rules 'of an unimaginable complexity', according to prosecuting counsel, and 703 branches and 240,000 members (of whom only 37,000 voted). But these *Advisories* – which met monthly on a national, regional and area basis – were organs of the Communist Party, designed to promote its strategies and devices under the auspices of its Industrial Department, personified by the Industrial Organiser of the moment. According to the prosecution, first Allison, then Kerrigan had pulled the strings in the post-war ETU.

The defence counsel did not deny the existence of these *Advisories* – though members of the Party did<sup>49</sup> – but argued that the Court was not interested in their composition or functions save where this bore on the question of a conspiracy intended to rig ballots. 'It is not concerned with whether these *Advisories* sought to influence Union policy but whether they faked elections', said Neil Lawson QC. Informal meetings certainly occurred but the truth of the matter according to the defence was that two rival groups within the union were involved in a power struggle and one had seized upon muddle to claim fraudulent conspiracy as a way of discrediting the other. The ETU had if anything fallen into the pitfall of making 'almost every conceivable office elective' creating the most fearful logistical problems for itself in the conduct of ballots involving so large a membership. The prosecution nevertheless called 9 witnesses, who testified to the existence of both the National Advisory and London Advisory as well as a National Aggregate Conference at which Communists elaborated their policies for the ETU. The fact that former Communists such as Chapple and William Blairford supplied the detail gave authority to this evidence, though the trial judge, Mr. Justice Winn, in his summing up, drew attention to Chapple's tendency to overstate the controlling powers of these *Advisories*. The prosecution had dramatised all that they could, trying for example, to invest Haxell's re-election with an esoteric dimension by alleging that his position in the Communist hierarchy gave him rank over Foulkes and the Communist members of the ETU's executive council. Thus, although the general secretaryship was not the most powerful position in the Union, the prosecution confidently announced that Haxell would issue orders to the others. The judge took a more sensible view of the matter, however, and specifically doubted that Haxell and company received orders from anybody.

He reasoned that the Communist leadership of the ETU were entrusted with a degree of independent discretion in deciding how best to organise in order to achieve CP objectives. He also drew attention to their unquestioned commitment to the interests of ETU members. The

Court had heard from John Hendy – a Communist praised by Mr. Justice Winn for his adroit circumlocution under questioning – a man who had been sarcastically dubbed ‘Honest John’ by other Party members for objecting to George Allison’s advice that ETU votes should be obtained without undue regard for the Rule Book. The judge said that it was only realistic to appreciate ‘the tendency of all forms of single-minded devotion to an ideology, whether religious, political or economic, to degenerate into fanaticism, and a state of obsessive delusion that the only criterion of good and ill in conduct is utility for the achievement of chosen ends’. The conditions for corruption inside the ETU were good – the leaders were bound together by camaraderie and a shared vision and they were able to operate with a degree of secrecy and collective longevity of office. They had developed double standards and bent the rules ‘for the long-term good’ of the union’s membership.

There was not slightest doubt in Mr. Justice Winn’s mind that ‘not only was the ETU managed and controlled by Communists and pliant sympathisers but it was so managed in the service of the Communist Party’ and it was ‘double-talk’ to say otherwise. The Communists were people for whom ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ were relative terms and this made them far more difficult to assess as witnesses than ‘wholly dishonest rogues’.

On 3 July 1961 Winn declared that Byrne had been validly elected general secretary and granted an injunction against Haxell. Despite this verdict a majority of full-time officials and Head Office staff continued to support the Communist line and the 1961 policy conference cheered when one delegate referred to Byrne as ‘this puppet appointed General Secretary’.<sup>50</sup> The TUC insisted that Foulkes submit himself to a ballot and the ETU was expelled in September 1961 when he refused to do so, despite the fact that it had an appeal pending. In the subsequent Executive elections the Communist majority was lost (only Harry West and Jim McKerman retained their seats). The ETU was then readmitted to the TUC and Foulkes was expelled from the union. In 1965, after a rules revision conference and ballot of the membership, the ETU resolved to ban Communists from all paid or unpaid offices of the union. The Party protested in vain that this would rob the membership ‘of courageous, efficient shop stewards’. The pretext for the ban was once again Communist interference in confidential union business; the irony is that this time the evidence included an anonymous document (which the Party disowned) advocating annual conferences with policy-making powers. But it was too late to demand more democracy. By this time the ETU executive was dominated by the Right, and the group concerned soon demonstrated that it was perfectly capable of ignoring the decisions of the existing biennial conference. Thus it reversed union policy, in defiance of a recent ETU conference majority, by voting for wage restraint at the TUC congress. The days when the ETU was synonymous with the Left were over.

### **POST MORTEM**

The Party refused to back Haxell – who had topped the poll in the 1959 elections to its Executive – and accepted his resignation. It conducted its own enquiry after the court's verdict was given but the post-mortem dragged on for months revealing how deeply damaged the organisation felt because of the affair. The TUC decision to expel the ETU had been supported by 7,320,000 votes to just 735,000, despite interventions on its behalf from Clive Jenkins and Danny McGarvey. When Sam Goldberg, one of the ETU defendants, claimed that ballot rigging filled him with 'loathing and disgust' he was met with ironic laughter from the assembled delegates who seemed to be unimpressed that Goldberg did not belong to the Party and had been exonerated by the courts.<sup>51</sup> 'Show me a Communist and I will show you a crook' crowed Charlie Pannell, the Labour MP for Leeds West, when supporting the proposal to disaffiliate the ETU from the Labour Party at the 1961 annual conference. Another vast majority – 5,337,000 to 642,000 – was amassed and the organisation that had faithfully supported Communist policies at successive Labour conferences throughout the 1950s was removed at a stroke. It was less easy to get rid of the union's militants, however, as the unofficial strikes in the winter of 1962-3 showed. Power cuts ensued and it was Communists such as Charlie Doyle (ex-CPUSA) who led the strikers through a National Committee of Shop Stewards which they set up for this purpose. Doyle was later expelled from the union and the Communists had to regroup again. What had been permanently lost, however, was the idea that the Party could go it alone in building the base for left domination of the unions and the Labour Party.

In late 1964 and the first months of 1965 the Party convened a number of discussions at King Street on industrial work which fed back the thoughts of its cadre on the contradictory style of Communist intervention in the unions and shed light on the purposes of its militants. The problem of the new ban in the ETU had evidently inspired this review but the Party had also decided to build a Broad Left in the unions and needed to think through the necessary reorientation.<sup>52</sup> Len Dawson, who had been involved in the leadership of the ETU, noted that by denying the existence of Advisory committees in Court, the Party had necessarily 'restricted the personnel in number and content for security reasons and has ... led to a like restriction in the party work in the unions.' One aspect of this was that:

in the two years that I have sat on this [Advisory] committee, although we paid a certain amount of lip service to the need to discuss and shape industrial policy in the union, little or nothing was done in this direction – mainly because we were so wrapped up in discussions on the election of union officers that it would have needed a weekend on every occasion that we met rather than an evening.

Dawson argued that:

There is little doubt that prior to 1961 the party machine in the union broadly speaking classified the left in the union into four groups: (1) Those in the Party on the inside and trusted with all the under-cover work that went on; (2) The rest of the Party who were loyal to the Party lead and thought everything was above board; (3) Those members of the Labour Party and the left who were prepared to follow instructions and were treated with contempt for doing so, and (4) All those who opposed the old [Communist] leadership, who were bastards no matter what reason they were in opposition.

He added:

The new leadership were determined to change this attitude, and succeeded to the point of having open discussion with many members of the left outside our Party. And it was this attitude which led to the outstanding success at the Policy Conference at Scarborough, where the determination of policy and the selection of candidates were the outcome of what were virtually public meetings.

Dawson referred to the 'recent ballot' in the ETU as a 'disaster' which had caused some comrades to blame Kerrigan 'as he was responsible for the sending out of the document'. It was, in fact, a collective responsibility in Dawson's view:

The document in question was considered by the leading comrades in the union after discussion with many friends on the left and at no time did it enter our mind that there was any danger or need to place any restriction on reasonable circulation, and this must be the case for any comrades at the centre who may have considered this document, and if action was to be taken it would have to be taken against all concerned.

In fact, of course, it is far more important to consider why it did not enter our heads that it was a dangerous procedure, and the answer ... is that it was our normal method of work and I am sure that the great majority of our comrades on the EC would have regarded this as no more dangerous than many other similar documents they have circulated.

We have now to consider the future and it would seem that there are only two courses open to us. We can try to increase our security in the future, have smaller and tighter bodies, and try to eliminate those people in our Party who give information both to our opponents and the Press, and since we do not know their identity this would be impossible and future leaks would be even more disastrous. Or we can learn the lessons of Scarborough and approach our work in a public fashion, drawing in much larger bodies of workers on discussions on general industrial policy. There will, of course, be objections to this course from comrades who still

believe in the holy cow of trade union positions, and who think that the capture of trade union leadership will transform the political situation. If there are any such comrades left after the events in the ETU then the forty odd thousand votes our candidates received in the general election should clear his thoughts on this subject. It may not be a bad thing for the Party if we have to spend more time considering our policy and approach in order to increase our support amongst workers; trade union positions would then be held by popular support and not by organisation.

By the end of the discussion, 31 individual contributions had been recorded, together with 16 from Advisory Committees and four from the Districts. But Dawson's contribution covered the main points. Others likened the last few years in the life of the ETU as 'like watching a Greek tragedy' in which the end is certain. 'When I personally tried to intervene in the matter of rigged ballots', Reg Beech observed, 'the only effect was to arouse personal suspicions':

In fact, I have had the argument put to me – urging me as a then branch secretary – to agree to fiddling a ballot on the alleged Marxist argument that the T.U. environment must be changed in order to create socialist union thinking – then the techniques of ballot fiddling would no longer be necessary.

Beech saw the culture of secrecy as damaging and a step backwards compared to the pre-war fraction meetings which non-Party people were invited to attend. He thought that all political discussions should be open 'on the job and in the bench rooms', including those discussions looking at candidatures for elections. The Party could actually champion democracy within the unions while: 'discussion and leadership relative to trade union matters should be a regular feature of the "Daily Worker" and not emanate from an inner-Party, inner faction, inner T.U. group functioning without the mass basis essential for success. We failed in the ETU because we had no mass basis; we lacked roots.' Others concurred with this view. F.W. Griffiths, also of the ETU, was 'thankful' that the ETU scandal had ended a period of 'incorrect work': 'We can now firstly estimate whether controlling T.U.'s without mass support is worth while. We can institute *broad* open Party *political* work inside the union, where the principle should be to recruit and build our Party (not the ETU)'. It seems that running the ETU, in the perception of some Communists, had been incompatible with proselytising for the CP. The Party was too interested in 'taking office under cover' to risk jeopardising its electoral chances by openly fighting for Communist politics.

Griffiths wanted to disband secret Advisories. But Bill Smart of the AUBTW thought that their work was 'of cardinal importance', believing that they were originally conceived not to focus on elections but 'to

work on ways for the application of the line of the Party to the particular industry' and to fill the gap between National and District Committee. A. F. [Bert] Papworth was also '... against widening – most dangerous thing for the Party to do or make public the question of Advisory committees'. In the T&G: 'instead of this helping the Bans campaign it would only strengthen the new leadership to take action to keep the bans on longer'. Papworth asked rhetorically: 'What could happen if Feather or O'Brien got their hands on opening-up of Advisory meeting?' – or Carron in the AEU obtained Advisory information. He concluded that: 'It is unwise to have open meetings – better if anything to tighten up, to do [the] work properly'. The discussion also revealed, as E. Rechnitz of the TGWU put it, 'that there are two Communist Parties – members of one work in ward branches and members of the other work in industry'. While Rechnitz complained that the wards were not interested in industrial work, other contributors to the discussion (such as Beech) had pointed to the chain of command emanating from the Industrial Department and to the culture of clandestinity which it fostered. But the complaint from other quarters was on the lack of this facility in important areas such as the Midlands where, according to W. Ferrie of the NUVB, there was no industrial organiser, despite the obvious significance of the car industry.

Dick Woolf of DATA favoured the retention of secret Advisories alongside open work. He used the telling phrase that the Party was forced to 'operate in machinery'; he meant trade union machinery and he pointed to the need to master it in order to win positions on the Executive, as in DATA. But he saw also that to win allies required open work and an agreement that 'progressives', rather than Party members, should sometimes go forward as union candidates. In this way the Executive of DATA had in practice become a real alliance of the Left. Bowden of the Bakers' Union favoured the same approach in building alliances and making any future purge of Communists unthinkable. Vic Wyman and John Foster of the AEU, however, spoke in favour of Advisories. Foster said:

We cannot put ourselves in the category of the other parties. I don't think we are like other parties ... We are a party of a different type which requires a particular attention to our work in order to resist our enemies ... our approach to the building of Socialism in Britain is based on the fact that it is a class struggle. They, right and extreme left, will line up against us together. That is why Ernie Roberts lost ... Can we work completely in the public way. No! we cannot work completely in the public way because of history and the lessons we have learnt, not from the American experience but from our own here in Britain.

Foster was one of those who believed that the Party did not focus enough on industry. 'It is in industry that our work is the most vital and

most important', he observed; and it was for this reason that he was: 'in complete agreement with [the] present form of *Advisories*'. But Howard Hill, reporting on the decisions taken by the Sheffield Area Secretariat, in relation to the Party's Advisory machinery, said:

It was agreed we should exercise greater caution. No written material to be issued excepting the bare details of meetings. National *Advisories* to be restricted to comrades with national responsibilities including representatives from *Advisories* at lower level. It was felt that *Advisories* should be periodically elected from among comrades within the organisation concerned.<sup>53</sup>

Greater clandestinity seems to be the message from this quarter. Some sectors had only recently adopted *Advisories* – the first national meeting of the advisory for university staff met on 2 January 1964 and 'the general tendency of the comrades was to want more meetings': '... These gatherings do discuss matters which could not be dealt with in public', said the rapporteur. But when the Transport Committee held a discussion on industrial work on 7 February 1965 Ernie Prevost wanted: 'more open meetings with non-Party people attending. Show how we work'. Fred Keen expressed fears that bans could be extended to the AEU. Stan Turner thought that 'more open work' would 'make it more difficult for the right wing' to take such action. But Peter Thiele argued that: 'We have got to maintain meetings of a type in which we discuss policies and elections and these need to be private'. Fred Miller said: 'We must also face the fact that election to some trades union posts has led to the corruption of some of our comrades'. He thought that *Advisories* should be based on industries rather than unions. He also argued that: 'all types of "secret" correspondence should be cut out', and that 'much of this correspondence now has reached a childish stage'.

Other contributors to this discussion put the Party full-timers' viewpoint. Harry Bourne (Midlands) reported that a discussion among this important group stressed that 'Left Unity' had to be developed as a basic principle of Party work in the unions. Some organisational fine-tuning was recommended. *Advisories*, they thought, should meet in every District to cover two or three of its main industries. The Party's interventions at TUC congress and elsewhere needed to be guided by more detailed and specific 'Needs of the Hour' bulletins. More industrial organisers were required at District level. But the main message from this group was that 'Broad Left organisation [is] important but no substitute for much stronger work directly'. This seemed to mean that: 'Fractions are vital and left groups cannot replace them; in fact, for the latter to function effectively, we must have [the] former'. When a summary was made of the discussion, the three most important issues turned on the question of whether industrial work should be

'completely open', or more closed or, finally, that it should take a more open form whilst retaining some form of closed Advisory machinery. Only four people preferred the first option, just one voted for the second, while 34 – including all the Districts and existing Advisories – voted for the compromise.<sup>54</sup>

The discussion itself seems to reveal that in 1965 the Party's leading industrial cadres were trying to negotiate a transition in the style of their work which would give the Broad Left approach a chance of working. It suggests that the level of clandestinity that had operated in the 1950s was now regarded as a liability and inappropriate. The Party did not believe that it could wield the influence it wanted acting alone. It needed Left allies and to get them and keep them it needed their confidence and their active participation. All this counselled greater openness. But the militants still believed in the distinctiveness of the Party's ideology and required the closed fraction meeting the better to advance its claims. J. R. C.[ampbell] seems to have spoken last in the discussion. In his view the ETU membership turned against the leadership: 'Because they thought their union was operated ... from King Street and not by the rank and file. They thought, wrongly in my view, that the actual control of the union was being manipulated by a political party and not by the membership'. Campbell tellingly suggested that the manipulation was precisely in the opposite direction with the ETU leadership controlling King Street. He favoured the conduct of trade union work, 'in such a way that communists and non-communists can talk together on their policy': 'we have got to play the game with the left forces. When Ernie Roberts gets a smaller vote than Reg Birch it gives the impression that some communists who vote for Reg Birch do not vote for Ernie Roberts'. What was needed was 'more or less open groups', irrespective of union, discussing the problems of each industry on an annual or biannual basis. There remained the question of 'what are we going to do with the apparatus we have inside individual unions?' The problem arose because, as Campbell noted, 'As far as elections are concerned a certain degree of secrecy is necessary'.

Campbell identified two additional problems. First, of the Party's 25,000 trade unionists perhaps only one in ten attended an industrial Party meeting each year. This was not good enough. Second, and 'most important':

there is a big gap in generations and we must take positive steps to bring in new party members or we will find ourselves without any cadres because we have neglected their training.

Industrial cadre of the generation to which Jimmy Reid and Arthur Scargill belonged were thin on the ground. The events of 1956 had cost the Party talented militants and deterred others from joining. Even Scargill, who remained a member after 1956, resigned in 1962-3, probably

because he calculated that his progress through the NUM did not depend on the Party machine. Campbell also claimed that the Party possessed a larger proportion of women members than 'any communist party in the western world', but it is not clear whether he regarded this as something that was reflected in its industrial work or not. A. Hunt of the Association of Scientific Workers had earlier in the discussion made this the main issue of his own contribution arguing that:

What is quite sure is that we cannot be satisfied with the work of the Advisories on the question of women. I would like to see every industrial Advisory Committee have a full-scale discussion on the problems of women workers in their industry, with particular reference to the Women's Charter. This can take place at all levels because the local implementation of the demands is an important question for union branches and trades councils. It should be a matter of importance to men as well as women. There is usually a women's aspect of industrial questions and the Advisories should be looking for this because the lead on women's issues is not being given by Party members but by people who may be quite right wing. The Party is not getting a reputation as a leader on women's rights.

This is an interesting claim and the record does not show if it was disputed in the discussion. Formally, as the next chapter will show, the Party had long since campaigned for equal pay and women's rights.

### THE BROAD LEFT

In the draughtsmen's union DATA/TASS, collaboration between the Communist and non-Communist left in drawing up joint slates for electoral purposes existed at lay level in the 1950s and 'by the 1960s, Labour left George Doughty was long established as General Secretary, three CP members had served as President, and there was an established cadre of CP members among full-time officers'.<sup>55</sup> Frank Watters's work among the Yorkshire miners, by contrast, was 'largely confined to Communist Party members' who were organised as a caucus to draft resolutions, organise interventions and decide candidatures from 1953. The leading figures were Jock Kane and Sammy Taylor (chair of the Yorkshire Area CP), both of whom eventually got on to the NUM National Executive. Watters apparently wanted a broader alliance but was hampered by the dearth of Labour left-wingers in the Yorkshire area of the union during the 1950s. He also faced opposition from members of the Party 'who did not want to work with outsiders'.<sup>56</sup> Yet the numbers were stacked against going it alone. Abe Moffatt challenged Ernest Jones for the presidency of the union in 1954 and lost by 162,396 votes to 348,391. Watters argued that this independent bid for the presidency was forced on the Party 'because there was no broader cohesive left organisation' in the union.<sup>57</sup> Similarly Sammy Taylor only obtained 13,000 votes to the winning candidate's 27,000 when he

contested the Yorkshire vice-presidency. The 1960 presidential elections were a debacle from the Party's standpoint because Communists stood against each other as well as against their opponents, apparently heedless of central guidance. Only 'a masterpiece of detailed organisation' won a seat on the national executive for Sammy Taylor in 1959 and Jock Kane became Area Agent for Doncaster in 1962 as the Party increased its membership on the Yorkshire coalfield (from 300 in 1954 to 440 in 1960). But it was not until 1964 or 1965 that the Communists met with non-Party left-wingers from the wider Yorkshire area, although regular formal meetings had begun in Barnsley in 1960.

One participant remembered that: 'The main thing was to get people elected to vacancies in the area and nationally where they could exert influence'; though others insisted that policy was the priority.<sup>58</sup> Kane duly won the Financial Secretaryship in 1966 and the Yorkshire region emerged as one of those able to get resolutions on peace, China, the GDR, Soviet trade and so forth on to the NUM conference agenda. Secrecy and intrigue remained necessary features of caucusing, as they did elsewhere, and Watters even stayed away from the 'Broad Left' meetings to avoid alienating non-Party people who might think the whole thing was being engineered by the Communist full-timer. As late as 1964 there was still difficulty in convincing some of the militants – including former Communists – that the Party did not represent the 'negative Left'. Briefly, the so-called Chesterfield Keep Left produced its own policies and held its own day-schools and meetings, excluding the Party from its deliberations. But from 1965 the Communists threw their weight behind the idea of contesting the General Secretaryship (upon Will Paynter's retirement) with the candidature of Lawrence Daly and a broad left developed around this campaign. It was not until 1967, however, that the Yorkshire Left formed an open body called the Barnsley Miners' Forum. Its Broad Left credentials can be gauged from the fact that it was Arthur Scargill's idea and it was addressed by the likes of Lawrence Daly, Mick McGahey, Emlyn Williams, Jack Dunn, Jimmy Reid and Frank Allaun MP.

This pattern was repeated elsewhere and so it was not until the mid-60s that the Communist strategy of using the unions to steer the Labour Party was finally seen to depend on 'left progressive majorities' composed in the main of non-Party people.<sup>59</sup>

Clearly, from what has already been said above it would seem that the fate which befell the Party machine in the ETU helped to change the balance of forces within the Party in favour of those wanting a more open alliance policy. But as Watters's experience demonstrates the delay in the appearance of the Broad Left was not simply a function of the Party's addiction to controlling everything. Over the period since 1951 circumstances changed in such a way that the Broad Left approach became more realistic. First the rapid wartime expansion of the Party became a more distant memory and the expectation of a repeat performance faded with it. The reality was that the Party's factory branches were falling in

number. Those that did exist were not particularly stable and it was clear that the organisation had failed to recruit in industry on anything like the scale of 1935–45. It was increasingly obvious that the Party needed allies, but also that it could not dictate the terms of the alliance. Second, the Cold War isolation of the Party, which reinforced its siege mentality, gradually eased. One unforeseen development which materially affected this thaw in industry was the growth of shop steward militancy which created the sort of milieu the Communists found congenial. The TUC regarded the growth of shop stewards' committees which provided funds, intelligence and organisation in unofficial strikes as a challenge to the established trade union organisation. Communist shop stewards and their allies had their AEU credentials suspended, for example, when Sheffield and Dagenham militants convened a national engineering shop stewards' conference in defiance of the union leadership in 1957. By 1963 it was conservatively estimated that as many as 100,000 shop stewards existed in British engineering alone.<sup>60</sup> Upon this structurally determined conflict of interest other issues could be attached by the Party – or so it believed. Third it followed from the growth of shop steward numbers and influence that a large constituency of non-Party activists had come into existence within the unions – a necessary component of any Broad Left and one that was big enough to force the Party to take a more political, less conspiratorial, approach to alliance building. Fourth, the state, as we saw in previous chapters, became increasingly concerned to break the 'wage-price spiral'. There was then a growing agenda for the militants to coalesce around, and the scope for opposition only increased when a Labour Government was returned in October 1964.

### **WAGE MILITANCY**

It should be clear from what has already been said in chapter five that the Party generally supported wage militancy. In February 1954 the Economic Committee produced 'The Trade Unions and Production: The Communist Attitude', which reminded everyone that the CP 'is a party seeking to attain the emancipation of the workers through class struggle [and] is opposed to all forms of class co-operation'. This distinguished the party from: 'The reformist trade union leaders [who] seek to perpetuate capitalism by class co-operation, and advocate an increased productive effort by the workers'.<sup>61</sup> The Communists already saw how the Labour Party and the TUC 'put the drive for higher productivity in the centre of their programmes': 'All their policy is built on this foundation', it concluded. Not long after the war the gap in productivity between British and American industry had become painfully obvious to the political elite. The Anglo-American Council on Productivity embarked on a campaign to bridge the gap from August 1948 and the TUC was drawn into its work. Although the 1951 Conservative Government pleaded for wage restraint, the annual wage round had become an annual ritual by 1953 while the rate of price

increases quickened and came to be identified as a long-term problem. By 1956 the Chancellor, Harold Macmillan, was leading the Government's crusade for greater moderation and was able to draw attention to the contrast between Germany and the USA – where wages and output per worker had risen *pari passu* since 1953 – and Britain, where wages had risen twice as fast as *per capita* output. Though the TUC rejected wage restraint, to 'a great roar of approval' from the assembled delegates, at that September's congress, the official campaign for moderation in wage matters had really just begun. In July 1957 a Council for Prices, Productivity and Incomes was set up in the belief that it could exercise the appropriate influence in the settlement of pay awards. The engineering strike of 1957 – the first national strike in the industry since 1922 – was succeeded the following year by strikes of shipbuilders and London transport workers, the Government having prevented an even worse problem by conceding to the demands of miners and railway workers. The Council for Prices meanwhile soon antagonised the unions with its talk of the need for unemployment, deflationary measures and market flexibility and by 1961 it was shut down in recognition of its failure.<sup>62</sup> The drive for wage restraint, however, was simply continued by other means.

The Communist Party took the view that the propaganda for higher productivity emanating from trade union and Labour sources was riddled with 'capitalist preconceptions', including the idea that no increase in real wages was possible at the expense of profits. It was suspicious that the workers would be denied the benefit of productivity increases in their wage packets and that the British Productivity Council was concerned solely to extract more work from the employee, usually on the basis of the existing (unsatisfactory) industrial equipment. In the years 1950-54, according to one Party report, increased productivity had been earmarked simply to finance more armaments.<sup>63</sup> It urged that the workers should be made to realise 'that the level of wages is not dependent on the level of productivity but ... on the organised power of the working class in relation to the capitalist class'. The former was a function of numbers, organisation, and the workers' understanding of contemporary capitalism: 'It follows that the primary task of British trade unionism is to build up the unions by persistent recruitment and by spreading an understanding of their class role'. The Party wanted stronger, bigger unions conscious of themselves 'as instruments of class power'. This was one of the principal reasons why it complained that 'less than one-sixth of the women are organised'.

While 'the reformists' neglected the issue in practice, the Communists insisted that: 'recruitment to the unions, the building up of powerful shop stewards' organisation, the education of the mass of trade union members in the elements of the class struggle' was 'a task requiring the attention of all trade union officers ... and of all trade union militants'.<sup>64</sup> This was clearly seen to be one of the Communists'

main objectives within the unions. Production, Willie Gallacher had pointed out, was the job of the employers and their apparatus. The job of the Communists was 'the most uncompromising resistance to all attempts to intensify the labour of the workers'; and:

Every innovation proposed by the employers ... must be examined from the point of view of its effect on the intensity of workers' labour, their safety from accidents ... the regularity of their employment, the length of the working day, and ... the level of their earnings. The employers introduce these innovations for profit, and the unions must meet their introduction by demands which will safeguard the workers from increased speed up, from dismissals on account of redundancy, and must insist that increased earnings and shorter hours be guaranteed.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore:

In refusing to take part in productivity propaganda and drives, it is necessary to emphasise that our sole object is to defend and improve the workers' standards.<sup>66</sup>

The Party claimed that it was not opposed to the introduction of the most modern techniques and that it saw no virtue in stagnant productivity or of Britain lagging behind the productivity of the USA. However it opposed any change that increased the rate of exploitation and in practice it looked on all proposals for increased productivity with the gravest suspicion. Wage militancy, on the other hand, was defended as a means of forcing the employers to invest in the most modern techniques, though it was argued that Britain's low productivity derived from decades of imperialist complacency during which protected markets and cheap raw materials were plundered without let or hindrance. This was more than a baleful legacy. In Party analyses the priorities of imperialism were among the major factors causing the ongoing chronic under-investment in British industry.

Despite the annual prophecies of economic crisis which punctuated the years after 1948 the Party was of course perfectly well aware that, under conditions of full employment, real earnings had increased, as the table reproduced on p257, prepared for the Political Committee in 1956, reveals.

Detailed analysis of profit by industry accompanied these figures – it being an axiom of militant trade unionism that the big profit makers were to be hit hardest. The conclusion of the report was that 'inflation has been enormously profitable for both industry and the banks' under the conditions of expanding world trade, rising arms expenditure, and the absence of German and Japanese competition – conditions which

	productivity per worker	profits	average weekly earnings	cost of living	real weekly earnings
1948	100	100	100	100	100
1949	100	106	104	103	101
1950	100	119.5	109	105.5	103.5
1951	100	145.5	120	116	103
1952	108	150	129.5	126	102.5
1953	114.5	153	136.5	130	105
1954	119.5	169	146.5	133	110
1955	125	190	155.5	139	112 <sup>67</sup>

had characterised the previous ten years. Inflation had 'called forth a powerful wages drive and, by maintaining a high level of employment, [has] made the workers far too strong for the capitalists to be able to achieve the reduction in the people's living standards which is the necessary basis of the monopolists' drive for maximum profits'. The 'fight for wages' – success in which was necessary as one of the supports of full employment in the Communist view – had to continue in view of the employers' publicly expressed 'drive for unemployment'.<sup>68</sup> The Communists were as good as their word on wage militancy, missing no opportunities to prosecute the struggles for higher pay and always ready to deny the causal role of wages in British rates of price inflation throughout the years up to 1968.<sup>69</sup>

A fortnight after Reginald Maudling replaced Selwyn Lloyd as Chancellor in July 1962 the Macmillan Government set up a National Incomes Commission to police the wage round and campaign for a permanent incomes policy involving a 2.5 per cent wage 'norm'. The unions did not support this body which soon proved to be another empty quango – one that the incoming Labour Government disposed of in 1964. But the NIC did give the Party an opportunity to restate its position in favour of militant trade unionism. In August 1962 the Industrial Department drafted '*A Militant Wages Policy: The Alternative to NIC*'. This was prepared with a view to organising opposition to the Conservatives' White Paper on *Incomes Policy and the National Incomes Commission* at the forthcoming TUC. The Inland Revenue Staff Federation and the Chemical Workers Union had both submitted resolutions defending the principle of an incomes policy. The unions concerned talked about the need to 'bring about greater equality' and of the eradication of 'the anomalies of the current wage and profits scramble'. The Party was well aware of arguments linking an incomes policy to the problems of low paid workers; to public sector workers unable to keep up with wage rises in the private sector; and to old age pensioners left behind by the growth of average earnings. It also realised that since 1960 the OEEC

had argued that every government needed a wages policy to combat inflation.

Indeed, on this occasion the Party emphasised the very much higher rates of inflation in wholesale prices in Britain between 1953 and 1959 as compared to the rest of the OEEC, observing that at 14 per cent the rate was actually double, or more than double, the rate of price rises in West Germany, Sweden, Belgium, Italy, Denmark and the Netherlands. The NIC, however, was in the Party's view nothing more than an 'impudent' attempt to blame the unions for this problem when it was obvious that inflation was rooted in the increase in world prices for food and raw materials, in the high interest rate policy of the Conservative Governments, in the huge devaluation of the pound sterling in 1949, in military spending – notably at the time of the Korean War – and in the excessive gains of shareholders. Noting that 'there is, of course, no complete answer to the wages-prices problem under the capitalist system of society', the report condemned the Stop-Go method of British macro-economic management which held back productivity increases in the UK economy in the interests of 'the reactionary finance oligarchy of the City of London'. Stop-Go policy, according to the CP, prevented a solution to the inflationary issue which concentrated on the productivity side of the equation. This idea was widely subscribed to, but the Party was also associated with the perception that initiatives on productivity were simply plots by the employers and their state, concerned to increase profits. Its concern for productivity was not a distinguishing feature of Party policy in the 1950s and 1960s.

It was obvious to the Party's Industrial Department that if the strong unions were held back by effective measures of wage control, the weaker ones would have no chance against the employers; and so the *Militant Wages Policy* report concluded that:

The moral is to continue the policy of continual wage pressures and to defend the principles of collective bargaining, industry by industry, while seeking to make the wage movements and the methods of negotiation more effective from the point of view of the low paid workers and other groups who tend to be left out in the cold.<sup>70</sup>

Some Communists could see the limitations of the existing wage struggle. After all, the Party sought to do much more than speak for the well organised and those who enjoyed a strong market for their labour. It was strongly represented in the NUM, a union whose members were paid very badly in the context of a declining market for coal – a context that undoubtedly hampered militant trade unionism in some areas of the union. When the Industrial Department drafted policies for the coal industry it was able to draw on the expertise of Mick McGahey, Mick Weaver, Abe and Alex Moffat, Horace Green, Frank Watters, and the like; they knew perfectly well that wage militancy did not benefit

everybody. The NUM suffered from its federal structure and the entrenched parochialism that seemed to go with it. Its national leadership lacked authority and effectiveness. The union's constitution was an obstacle to national strike action, requiring a two-thirds majority before such action could proceed. Hundreds of unofficial strikes occurred but they made little difference to miners' pay. John Hughes argued in a paper prepared for the Industrial Department that the NUM more than any other union 'has a vested interest in Labour working out a strategy of national economic development that maximises the increase in real wages in the context of relatively stable prices', because a further shift in the price scissors between coal and oil, to the detriment of the former, would further impair the bargaining power of the NUM 'by dramatically curtailing the profitable operation of the coal industry'.<sup>71</sup> So why was the idea of an incomes policy anathema to the Party?

In 1962 there was the obvious objection that the Conservative Government was not concerned with equity. It had no proposals for a minimum wage; it was not interested in equalising pay between men and women; there was no suggestion of doing anything about derisory wage rises or excessive profits in those very productive industries where wages might be restrained in the future. The NIC was simply a way of campaigning against wages and delaying increases in pay, or so the Party argued. Wage rises under the new dispensation would no longer relate to the cost of living, to profits or productivity, or be judged according to the principle of comparability. Britain lacked the degree of centralisation which allowed the unions and the employers' organisation in Sweden to plan wage rises together in the context of an apparently permanent social democratic governmental regime dedicated to the pursuit of egalitarian social policies and an active labour market strategy. The Communists knew that there was absolutely no prospect of such a system being created in Britain and were not really interested in such schemes in any circumstances. They wanted action over women's pay and in relation to the low paid but the prevailing view in the Party could not be shifted from wage militancy – as was revealed when Labour tried to implement wage restraints after 1964. The Party said that:

There can be no doubt that a gross and indefensible gulf has opened between the highest paid and the lowest paid in industries like mining, steel, engineering and that a similar gulf exists between men and women's wages in nearly all industries and occupations.<sup>72</sup>

But it also believed that:

In the last analysis wage differences under capitalism are based on the strategic position of the industry concerned, and on the strength and mili-

tancy of the unions operating in it. There is no substitute for militancy with the unremitting pressure which it involves. It is the duty of the unions to make this point abundantly clear.

The best that the Communists could recommend was that the TUC should assist workers in the low-paid industries to get organised; that the unions in the relatively well-paid industries should deliberately seek to reduce pay differentials between the high and low paid in those industries; that strong unions should organise solidarity action to help workers who found it difficult to strike, such as nurses; that consultations with unions organising women should explore 'how ... the demand for equal pay for equal work should be implemented'; and that pensions should be indexed-linked with average earnings.

In reality adverse market conditions played a big part in ensuring that even a large union like the NUM was unable to mount a single national strike throughout the period we are looking at, even though the miners' pay fell relative to average wages after 1961 and hundreds of thousands of jobs were lost or threatened. The NUM was under the leadership of the Right and the main effort of the Party was to change this by breaking its grip on the Yorkshire area, the largest area in the union. If this strategy succeeded it would also remove one of the props of the Gaitskell leadership of the Labour Party. Frank Watters was relocated to Barnsley to begin full-time work on this project in 1953, as we noted above.

What this might mean was annually displayed in the Party's 'Needs of the Hour' bulletin produced as a briefing, complete with model resolutions, for militants attending the TUC congress. In the 'Needs of the Hour 1963-64', model resolutions were suggested in the following areas (in the order presented):

1. Opposition to all forms of wage restraint.
2. For a 40-hour week maximum, to be supported by 'vigorous action for this objective'.
3. For more amalgamations of trade unions and a strengthening of existing federations.
4. For 'the principle of nationalisation and demands that it be applied with all possible speed to the (here insert the name of the specific industry with which the organisation is concerned) industry'.
5. Higher pensions.
6. Equal pay for eight million women workers and a campaign of action to get the recently adopted TUC Industrial Charter for Women implemented.
7. Public ownership of monopolies.
8. Rent controls.
9. 400,000 new houses per year.
10. Jobs and training for youth.
11. 'Conference deplores the fact that Britain has fallen behind other advanced

countries in the provision of higher education ... Conference calls for the expansion of higher education to a minimum of 350,000 places in universities, technical and teacher-training colleges by the early 1970s, and the necessary financial measures, without a parents' means test, to enable all children to take advantage of them'.

12. Expand East-West trade and trade with the Third World.
13. Renounce nuclear weapons.
14. Oppose arming West Germany with nuclear weapons.
15. Demand UN recognition of China.
16. Recognise the GDR.
17. For a European Security Treaty to replace NATO and the Warsaw Pact.
18. Oppose all nuclear bases in Britain and all foreign military bases in Britain.
19. Demand an enquiry into police methods of dealing with suspects and witnesses.
20. Bring about a diplomatic, economic and arms boycott of South Africa in accordance with decisions of the UN General Assembly.
21. Bring forward legislation 'to make the public incitement of race hatred and discrimination an offence'.
22. End colonialism, withdraw British troops stationed overseas.

Several observations can be made about this list. In the first place it represents a fairly stable mix of Communist demands in the period 1951-68. Points 12-18 clearly relate to the Cold War and it was a matter of common observation that the unions which repeatedly discussed these themes were the ones in which the Communists were strongest, such as the Electrical Trades Union in the 1950s.<sup>73</sup> These demands were given somewhat greater priority in the 1950s than they were by 1968, though the issue of nuclear war would rise again. The second point worth making is that Communists raised issues and demanded action in areas that could (and should) have concentrated the minds of decent liberals and democrats – Britain's policies towards South Africa, the best way of tackling racism within Britain, the problem of homelessness and Rackmanism, the poor state of British education and the excessive overseas military role of the British state all fall within this category. This brings me to a third observation: in addition to the wage and social wage militancy which the Party consistently pursued in this period it also brought an organised political agenda into British trade unionism. To a significant extent the Party also provided an organised opposition and alternative to the platform at TUC. It used its resources to scrutinise and criticise the policies of the trade union leadership and publicised its findings throughout the movement, championing issues on which progress was lamentably slow such as equal pay for women – though it has been noted that some members of the Party believed that not enough was being done on this issue by the Communists themselves.<sup>74</sup>

As our discussion of Communist economic analysis in chapter five showed, a programme of reforms was always implicit in the Party's

critique of British economic management, and this became more explicit in the 1960s. The Party wanted cuts in defence spending, more public ownership, a bigger social wage, bigger taxes on the wealthy, price controls, more investment, a regional policy, a shorter working week, and the extension of planning to trade and the activities of the big companies. Some members of the Party saw that a programme of structural reforms could be teased out of this wish-list. Bill Warren and others thought that if a credible alternative to the Labour Government's retreat from planning was to emerge, wage restraint would have to be one of its components. Labour left-wingers Royden Harrison and Stephen Yeo advanced a resolution at Labour's annual conference in 1965 that was based on a similar logic.<sup>75</sup> But this violently contradicted the policy of wage militancy around which the Party had been able to attract recruits and allies. The argument also emerged at the wrong time – a time when shop steward militancy, and the state's interest in curbing it, were both rising. Communists knew that the British trade union leaders wanted to keep the law out of industrial relations and that the state was just as surely interested in some form of corporatism – institutionalised wage restraint – or some sort of legal constraints. Collisions were looming and the opportunity to build Left alliances had never been stronger.

The Labour Government began a defence of sterling in November 1964 that soon led to higher interest rates and a raft of measures designed to reduce domestic demand. A Royal Commission on the role of trade unions, chaired by Lord Donovan, was established in February 1965, the same month in which the Government established a Prices and Incomes Board. By the spring it was apparent that Labour intended to set a norm of 3 to 3.5 per cent annual pay rises. Though a special TUC conference approved the prices and incomes policy in April, speculation against sterling continued on the money markets. The Government lost Frank Cousins as Minister of Technology in July 1966 precisely because it believed that the regulation of wages required statutory powers – a measure Cousins was dead set against. A wage freeze was introduced that month which the TUC General Council approved 20 votes to 12. The TUC congress in September, however, showed that the opposition to wage restraint had doubled since April 1965 to 3.9 million votes (with 5 million in favour). Cousins strongly implied that the law would be broken at that year's annual conference of the Labour Party, a likelihood made stronger when the wage freeze was succeeded by a period of 'severe restraint' in January 1967 and this in turn was followed by a 'period of moderation' in June which kept pay rises below the 'norm' established in April 1965. This proved too much for the TUC congress which voted against wage restraint in September, the month in which a protracted dock strike began in London and Liverpool. Despite its obdurate refusal to devalue sterling since its election in October 1964 the Government was forced to do just that in November 1967 and the Chancellor, James Callaghan, resigned just days later.

By now the politicisation of industrial relations was well advanced. A former Communist, Hugh Scanlon was elected President of the Amalgamated Engineering Federation (AEF), as the balance in the unions moved rapidly to the Left. The AEF held a one-day strike against Labour's incomes policy just six months later in May 1968 and in June the Donovan Commission's report focused public attention on the growth of unofficial strikes. No sooner had the Prices and Incomes Bill become law than the 100th TUC congress voted to reject statutory control of incomes by 7.7 million votes to 1 million. The Labour Party conference then voted 5 to 1 in favour of repealing the offending Act. It is tempting with hindsight to see these developments as preliminary skirmishes leading to the White Paper *In Place of Strife* in 1969 and the succeeding Conservative Government's Industrial Relations Act (1971) with all the 'Kill the Bill' demonstrations, political strikes and occupations that characterised the early 1970s. It has to be recorded, however, that various voices on the Left favoured an alternative economic strategy of structural reforms. The Tribune Group of MPs proposed such a package in January 1968; the TUC *Economic Review* began publication in the same year arguing a similar case. Individuals associated with the Institute of Workers' Control were also thinking through the sort of policies which Richard Pryke had elaborated the previous year.<sup>76</sup> Once the Left focused on this alternative it is arguable that the case for including some form of wage controls as part of a package designed to plan and restructure the economy could have been advanced.

But the industrial leadership of the CP was more concerned to promote rank and file militancy as a fillip to official action designed to prevent, among other things, further moves to corporatism, whether in the form of wage controls or attempts to incorporate workers' representatives on to the boards of the big companies. Ramelson was adamant that industrial democracy of this latter sort was a mere sham when applied in the private sector and one designed to corrupt the militants.<sup>77</sup> The Donovan Commission was seen as an attack on shop stewards from the moment it was set up, as was the final Report, even though it made no legislative proposals. Wage militancy was always justified in terms of heightening class consciousness and forging solidarity. Collision with the state only increased the chances of politicising conflict and it has to be said that the Party was really in no position to call a halt to wage militancy now even if it had wished to do so. Once more, though perhaps now with more credibility than in the recent past, the Party pointed to the dangers of mass unemployment as a tool of Government policy, invoking the report of the Prices and Incomes Board published in July 1968 in evidence.<sup>78</sup> The Party was also conscious of competition for the leadership of the rank and file militants emanating from other far left groups. Indeed various shop stewards' defence committees committed to wage militancy and opposition to legislative interference in collective bargaining had sprung into existence

in the London area in 1966, providing evidence of this sort.<sup>79</sup> Bert Ramelson encouraged Communist militants to organise a Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions (LCDTU), formally coming into existence in September 1966, whose purpose would be to demonstrate, lobby and organise against wage restraint and restrictions on free collective bargaining and attempts to incorporate trade union leaders, as well as the Government's apparent policy of returning Britain to mass unemployment. A national conference was arranged for December dominated by the Party and the factories where it was strong. All the failed measures of wage restraint in the past had been accompanied by threats of legislation to enforce controls one way or another. The problems experienced by the Labour Governments after 1964 merely accelerated the trend. 671 shop stewards claiming to represent scores of unofficial committees, trades councils and union branches turned up to the December conference. There might have been a sense of having heard it all before. But the circumstances were different, more likely to produce take-off than in the 1950s. The LCDTU might become a genuinely national movement. With the appearance of *In Place of Strife* in 1969 its moment had arrived.

## NOTES

1. See R. Church and Q. Outram, *Strikes and Solidarity: Coalfield Conflict in Britain, 1889-1966*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998.
2. A. McKinlay and J. Melling, 'The Shop Floor Politics of Productivity: work, power, and authority relations in British engineering, c. 1945-57', in A. Campbell, N. Fishman, J. McIlroy (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics: Volume 1 The Post War Compromise, 1945-64*, Ashgate, Aldershot 1999, pp222-41.
3. Quoted by N. Fishman, "The Most Serious Crisis Since 1926": the Engineering and Shipbuilding Strikes of 1957', in *ibid*, pp257-8.
4. J. Philips, 'Democracy and Trade Unionism on the Docks', *ibid*, p297.
5. The figures are cited in N. Fishman, *The British Communist Party and the Trade Unions, 1933-45*, Scolar Press, London 1995, pp294-6 and p314.
6. *Ibid.*, pp331-2.
7. J. Phillips, 'Labour and the Cold War: the TGWU and the Politics of anti-Communism', *Labour History Review*, 64, 1, Spring 1999, p44.
8. Vic Feather published *Defend Democracy* (1948) and *The Tactics of Disruption* (1949) and *How Do the Communists Work?* (1953).
9. Morgan Phillips Papers, NMLH, file GS/COM, 84i-ii Communist Box.
10. J. Hinton, *Shop Floor Citizens; Engineering Democracy in 1940s Britain*, 1994, p16.
11. Such as when the NUR conference voted to reject *Defend Democracy*.
12. See TUC Papers, Modern Records Centre, University of Warwick, file on 'Communism in British trade unions 1948-62', 292/770/1.
13. M. Crick, *Scargill and the Miners*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1985, p15.
14. See H. Horne, *All the trees were bread and cheese – the making of a rebel*,

Owen Hardisty, London 1998. Horne came to the CP via the Hunger Marches and began work at Vauxhall Luton in March 1940, where he remained for nearly 32 years as a shop steward and leader of the rank and file.

15. Ibid., and see also A. Excell, 'The Politics of the Production Line: autobiography of an Oxford car worker', *History Workshop Journal*, 1981, pp110-111, for an account of how shop stewards created a Joint Shop Stewards Committee linking the scattered factories of the car industry after the merger of Austin and Morris.
16. See on this J. Phillips, 'Labour and the Cold War: the TGWU and the Politics of anti-Communism, 1945-55', pp44-8.
17. *Defend Democracy* (1948) was drafted by Vic Feather, then the TUC's Assistant Secretary.
18. 24, 000 according to the *Daily Worker*, 16 December 1957 and 26,000 by 1958 according to the *Sheffield Star*, 28 October 1958.
19. District Committee reports to the AEU Executive Council, 1942-52.
20. *Daily Worker*, 20 November 1958.
21. *Sheffield Star*, 4 March 1952.
22. *The Times*, 4 April 1956.
23. *The Times*, 2 April 1956.
24. *The Times*, 26 April 1956.
25. *Sheffield Telegraph*, 14 September 1956.
26. L. Daly, 'The Fife Socialist League', *New Left Review* 4, July-August 1960.
27. *The Times*, 20 November 1956. It was modified after a second vote based on the financial returns of each branch supported the executive's watered-down resolution 'deplored the tragic situation and loss of life in Hungary' by 6,761 to 5,836.
28. S. Parsons, *Crisis in the Communist Party: the impact of the events of 1956 on the membership*, MA dissertation, Warwick University, 1981, pp135-6.
29. *The Times*, 14 November 1956.
30. *The Times*, 13 November 1956.
31. *Sheffield Star*, 6 April 1957.
32. The extent of shop stewards networks was revealed by the Court of Inquiry into the Briggs' Body Plant dispute of 1957. See K. Coates and T. Topham, *Industrial Democracy in Great Britain*, London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1968, p210.
33. *Sheffield Star*, 11 December 1957.
34. *Sheffield Star*, 16 December 1957 and 24 December 1957.
35. 'Vulcan', in *Sheffield Star*, 20 December 1957.
36. *Daily Worker*, 31 December 1957.
37. *Sheffield Star*, 17 November 1958.
38. *Daily Worker*, 30 April 1960.
39. *The Times* 17 February 1967.
40. J. Lloyd, *Light and Liberty: A History of the EETPU*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990, p233.
41. Ibid, p236.
42. Letter from Mark Young, member of ETU and CP, to *New Statesman*, 9 August 1958, p170.
43. Byrne was defeated by Haxell in the 1948 elections for Assistant General Secretary.

44. F. Chapple, *Sparks Fly!: A Union Life*, London, Michael Joseph, 1984, p49.
45. O. Cannon and J. R. L. Anderson, *The Road From Wigan Pier: A Biography of Les Cannon*, Gollancz, London 1973, p167.
46. *New Statesman*, 9 August 1958, p170.
47. Chapple, *Sparks Fly!*, p62. and E. Silver, *Victor Feather, TUC*, Gollancz, London 1973, p105.
48. A verbatim record of the trial proceedings is kept in files CP/MISC/ETU/1/1 to 3/13.
49. Haxell made the distinction between 'advisory committees', which he said all parties possessed including the CP, and the various bodies which the prosecution had referred to. He specifically denied the existence of the National Advisory Committee, the National Aggregate Conference, the London District Advisory Committee and the four London Advisory Committees. See C. H. Rolph, *All Those in Favour?: The ETU Trial*, Andre Deutsch, London 1962, p109.
50. *Daily Worker*, 4 January 1965.
51. *The Times*, 5 September 1961.
52. See file CP/CENT/IND/12/8 which contains a number of untitled documents containing these reports.
53. Untitled document, CP/CENT/IND/12/8.
54. 'Summary of Contributions On Industrial Work', nd, CP/CENT/IND/12/8.
55. J. McIlroy, 'Notes on the Communist Party and Industrial Policy', McIlroy, Fishman, and Campbell (eds.), *British Trade Unions and Industrial Politics: Volume 2 The High Tide of Trade Unionism, 1964-79*, Ashgate, Aldershot 1999, pp231-2.
56. Watters elaborated on this point in a valuable interview in *Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History*, 43, Autumn 1981, pp54-67. Here he placed the blame for sectarianism on individual Communists rather than the Party, though he qualified this statement immediately by claiming that the 'big influx of Scots in the mid-50s' to the Yorkshire coalfield had something to do with it because: 'They thought they could do the same in Yorkshire as they did in Scotland'. This suggests that a culture of sectarianism was involved, at least in Scotland. He also reinforces the point that until 'after 1960' there was not an effective Labour left: 'For a long time there was nothing between very right-wing Labour and the Communist Party'. This may also have been conducive to sectarianism. He adds that: 'If we seemed sectarian, it was the historical period we got caught up in'. There was no Labour left to ally with until the Bevanites and 'they never recognised the importance of trade unionism'. Nevertheless the only panel to invite Bevan to speak was the Doncaster panel 'under the influence of the Communist Party', p58.
57. F. Watters, *Being Frank*, p14.
58. Crick, *Scargill and the Miners*, pp14-24.
59. 'Trade Union Problems in 1964', report to the Political Committee, 7 May 1964, CP/CENT/PC/07/17. This seems to be the occasion when the Broad Left strategy was finally approved.
60. A. Marsh and E. Coker, 'Shop Steward Organisation in the Engineering Industry', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, June 1963, p189.
61. 'The Trade Unions and Production: The Communist Attitude', p1. CP/CENT/ECON/1/3.

62. See A. Cairncross, *The British Economy Since 1945*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992, pp112-4.
63. 'The Trade Unions and Production', pp2-3.
64. *Ibid.*, p4.
65. *Ibid.*, p4. Gallacher is invoked on p4 of this document which refers to his 'recent memorandum'.
66. *Ibid.*, p5.
67. 'Economic Committee Report Part Two', prepared for the Political Committee 22 March 1956, CP/CENT/ECON/1/4.
68. *Ibid.*, p14. The report cites the *Economist* 31, December 1955; the *Banker* December 1955; and the British Employers' Confederation as agencies advocating at least 700,000 unemployed.
69. See for example the following articles in *World News and Views*, V. Parker, 'The Engineer's Wage Claim', 20 June 1953; R. Spalding, 'The Port Workers' Wage Claim', 16 July 1953; H. Hill, 'Britain's Steel Industry', 10 October 1953; 'The Communist Plan', 23 November 1957; 'The Guardian's Cure for Decline', 29 March 1958; 'Britain's Crisis and the Way Out', report of the Economic Sub-Committee, *Marxism Today*, May 1965, pp134-47; 'Editorial Comments', *Marxism Today*, September 1966, pp257-9; 'Editorial Comments', *Marxism Today*, February 1967, pp33-5.
70. 'A Militant Wages Policy: The Alternative to NIC', 21 August 1962, p6, CP/CENT/IND/10/08.
71. J. Hughes, 'Notes on the Position and Work of the NUM', nd. CP/CENT/IND/12/10.
72. 'A Militant Wages Policy', p7.
73. See R. Bean, 'Militancy, Policy Formation and Membership Opposition in the Electrical Trades Union, 1945-61', *Political Quarterly*, 36, 1965, p182.
74. At the Industrial Meeting of 7 December 1964 which discussed the Party's style of work, following the ETU problem, A. Hunt of the Association of Scientific Workers made this point saying 'the lead on women's issues is not being given by Party members but by people who may be quite right wing. The Party is not getting a reputation as a leader on women's rights', CP/CENT/IND/12/8.
75. *Labour Party Annual Conference Report*, 1965, pp229-31. The idea was to link a 'socialist incomes policy' to the maintenance of full employment, an increasing standard of living, price controls and an improved social wage and measures of egalitarianism.
76. R. Pryke, *Though Cowards Flinch: An Alternative Economic Strategy*, MacGibbon and Kee, London 1967.
77. B. Ramelson, 'Workers' Control? Possibilities and Limitations', *Marxism Today*, October 1968.
78. Editorial Comments, *Marxism Today*, September 1968, p257.
79. See J. McIlroy and A. Campbell, 'Organizing the Militants: the Liaison Committee for the Defence of Trade Unions, 1966-79', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 37, 1 March 1999, pp2-9.

## 9. Science and Society

In the 1950s Communists were at home with the then fashionable ideas of progress through the application of science, knowledge and planning, but distinctly uncomfortable with the idea that an affluent society was emerging 'under' capitalism. The Party's outlook was seen to be 'modern' in important ways for as long as Soviet socialism seemed dynamic and progressive – which was the case long after the Stalinist political system had been discredited for most of the British left. But this was clearly jeopardised by the growth of the consumer society in the West and the absence of such a revolution 'in the land of socialism'. Rationing was left behind in 1957 and from the late 1950s Britain experienced the rapid growth of consumer spending. New consumer durables such as cars, televisions and various household appliances became available to millions of people. In 1951 there had been one million television sets, by 1954 there were 3.5 million. In the same period the circulation of the *Daily Worker* fell from 185,000 to 87,000. Some feared that these trends were related and that the political meeting, the street hustling and the old political oratory would go the same way as the *Worker*. Television and a passive consumerism would take over. By 1964 there were 13 million television sets and over 8 million cars in Britain. Communists were forced to reckon with the no doubt tendentious and exaggerated arguments of the period which deduced a trend to political conservatism from the idea of an increasingly privatised, affluent, and narrowly materialistic society.

But there was no denying that real changes in consumption had taken place and that more money and time was spent on leisure. New technologies also facilitated international cultural exchange as never before. By 1961 4 million British people were taking holidays abroad.<sup>1</sup> Supermarkets, boutiques, and rock'n'roll appeared from the mid-50s. Cultural alternatives and choices began to present themselves. People slowly became aware of a developing multicultural society in Britain itself. Issues of life-style became increasingly important. The middle class grew and became more heterogeneous. The industrial working class shrank while young people gained unprecedented access to disposable income. The fragmentation of cultural experience in relation to age, ethnicity, and gender began to receive articulation and amplifi-

cation in the 1960s. New emphases emerged in socialist and radical thought, partly in response to some of these developments. New subcultures and social movements were formed often in critical opposition to established organisations and official ideologies – including the Communists. Marxism itself became more pluralistic, more socialists began to reject centralist, bureaucratic, and conformist politics. At the end of our period the electorate slowly began to lose enthusiasm for the two-party duopoly. The Party was a barometer for some of these changes and increasingly marginalised by others. Ever alert to social trends the Communists knew that the 'dynamic sectors' included women and youth by the late 1950s and early 1960s and that even in the traditional strongholds, the withering of factory branches and the decline of the 'Communist vote' was related to the problem of keeping up with social change.

## WOMEN

After the war the Party continued to attach importance to the recruitment and mobilisation of women, as it had done during the conflict. Women were encouraged to get involved in all aspects of the organisation's work and the testimony of former activists is on record to show that individual women developed their abilities and confidence through their work in the Party and the YCL.<sup>2</sup> The Communists, so it was said, wanted a mass Party, not a man's Party. In 1950 the National Women's Organiser, Tamara Rust, drew attention to the issues of recruitment and mobilisation of women in relation to the general election of that year. Communist women had canvassed, addressed meetings, engaged in 'peace poster parades' and deputations and generally engaged in every aspect of campaigning. Women may not have been the major part of the Party's 'invisible backbone', as was claimed, but they were certainly a portion of it and the work of the British Peace Committee, to take an example, was 'very largely undertaken by women'.<sup>3</sup> Peace was of course one of the Party's big issues in the 1950 general election and women members were responsible for some of its agitational initiatives. Fifty of them had constituted themselves as Pollitt's Women's Brigade in 1950 touring the country with a petition against the hydrogen bomb. In the Scotland Division of Liverpool Eve Cohen had organised a women's meeting which marched on the Town Hall to highlight atrocious housing in the district. The East Ham Women's Section had taken similar action when it became clear that private house construction was being given priority over public housing in the area. Throughout the country housing and the peace campaign were given most emphasis. Frances Dean, the Parliamentary candidate for Wythenshawe in Manchester, managed to address a number of Co-operative Women's Guilds on the subject of peace. The WFTU, the World Youth organisation and the Women's International Democratic Federation were all gearing themselves up for a major

peace propaganda effort as International Children's Day approached on 1 June. But the Party had also identified 'the growing wages movement as providing a tremendous opportunity to draw in both the women factory workers and the wives of miners, engineers and railwaymen in support of the wage claims'. Its own female members were increasingly in paid employment<sup>4</sup> and it was conscious that a growing number of women were entering the workforce, though far more of them in the early 1950s still had to be appealed to as consumers who were conscious that the housekeeping money had been frozen even more effectively than wages.<sup>5</sup>

A special conference of Communist Women in 1951 concerned itself with the same mix of issues. The cost of living and the peace campaign occupied much of its time, but so did the 'the fight of the women employees in Metro-Vickers ... and in Rolls-Royce Glasgow' in relation to the engineers' pay settlement. Attention was given to the struggle of the women laundry workers in Barrow for trade union recognition and to the recent acquisition of the closed shop in a hosiery factory in Mansfield. The 'scandalously low rates of pay' of women workers and the opportunities presented by 'women for peace' received equal attention from the conference.<sup>6</sup> It also recommended the appointment of a women's organiser and the establishment of a women's group in every branch, borough and area of the Party. It called upon Communist women to work with women in the Labour Party and the Co-operative Women's Guild in a broad-based women's movement. In 1952 Communist women on the International Women's Day Committee successfully argued for a National Assembly of Women (NAW) to meet the following year in London on 8 March. Fifteen hundred delegates from trade unions, PTAs and a variety of other groups duly congregated and by 1953 membership stood at 7-8,000, organised in around 350 groups. To canvass for this event activists went door-to-door in the provincial cities trying to draw women into the Party's orbit, reportedly meeting disgruntled citizens as they did so, including mothers whose sons had been taken prisoner of war in Korea.<sup>7</sup> The NAW campaigned on all the big Party issues of the hour – the Korean War, German rearmament, food prices and wages, but also on homes, hospitals, schools and nurseries.<sup>8</sup> Individual groups developed their own local initiatives around issues of social policy, cultural events and other matters of concern to women.<sup>9</sup> Various educational projects were initiated to promote women in the Party including women's weekend schools such as those held at Wortley in Sheffield in the early 1950s with Marion Ramelson (the Yorkshire District Organiser) as one of the leading providers.

For all this activity women Communists were fully aware of many of the Party's shortcomings in relation to 'women's work'. Not that they were perfect themselves. Non-Party women, Barbara Wiseman reported in 1952, often found the Communists to be arrogant and

others in the Party admitted that sectarian attitudes often obstructed recruitment.<sup>10</sup> But once in the Communist Party women had more obstacles in their path than men. Nora Jeffries, later the National Women's Organiser, complained in 1951 of the lack of recognition of the specific obstacles that got in the way of women's involvement in Party life. The 'domestic slavery' of women remained the dominant fact of a woman's existence. Yet rarely was there any attempt made to assist women in the Party or any discussion about how these 'special difficulties' could be overcome. Jeffries agreed that the struggle for emancipation was not a feminist question but rather a part of the struggle for socialism – this much was Communist orthodoxy – but she emphasised that the Party could not hope to achieve socialism by bypassing half of the population.<sup>11</sup> Other women observed that the Party's rhetoric on equal rights was rarely implemented in practice, that the men needed to accept a greater share of domestic responsibilities and that work among women was allocated to women, rather than shouldered by the organisation as a whole.<sup>12</sup> When Communist women met to discuss issues of specific concern to themselves it was sometimes only too obviously a rare treat to be able to do so.<sup>13</sup> Delegates to the biannual congress were overwhelmingly male – 85 per cent at the 1957 congress. While women took part in every aspect of election work in 1951, the Party's candidates were usually men. Communist orthodoxy on the 'women's question' was itself hardly an infallible guide and even the rhetoric on equal rights was ambiguous. According to Bridget Hill for example, writing in 1956, the history of women in bourgeois society had shown that the individualism 'which [was] consistently preached by the ruling ideology' had largely been denied to women. When women received the vote in 1918, according to Hill's reckoning, this individualism had reached its zenith. The class basis of women's oppression was left intact, however, and the root causes of class inequality remained. The suffragettes' struggle ended with the formal granting of the vote, the socialist struggle was destined to take on what it left behind – the structured inequalities of class. But the Party's argument that class issues must now logically prevail tended to overlook both the myriad 'individual' inequalities between men and women that had yet to be corrected and the fact that there was no women's movement making a priority of their rectification.<sup>14</sup> By the mid-60s some women would insist on the connection between these two important facts, and one of the reasons their argument was found persuasive among women on the left was because the class argument had often functioned as an excuse for not taking the unequal treatment of women seriously enough.

In the years up to 1966 there were in fact only two national conferences of Communist women – the second was in October 1962, eleven years after the first. Throughout the entire period the Women's Advisory was overwhelmingly concerned with the same cluster of

issues: equal pay, peace, the cost of living, and the recruitment of women into the Party. But we can see other items creeping on to the agenda too. First there is a growing programme of social policy concerns. Issues such as the availability of affordable nurseries for pre-school children – provision in 1954 was said to be worse than before the war – generated real enthusiasm and focused activity among Party activists. It was linked to the issue of women and work, as was comprehensive education and the connected question of equal educational and career opportunities for girls. Second, the Women's Advisory committee began to show an interest in issues of women's health. 'Painless childbirth' first appeared as a topic for discussion on its agenda in 1953, cervical cancer, and 'mother and baby' issues came later. Occasionally complaints were voiced to the effect that the Executive was not fighting for the issues of concern to women and that the Districts and branches were in consequence allowed to neglect them too.<sup>15</sup> There is sometimes an impression of demoralisation conveyed by the minutes of the Women's Advisory. Its journal *Woman Today* was continually threatened with extinction due to low sales, despite the contemporaneous boom in women's magazines of the glossy variety, in which the politics, according to Tamara Rust, was smuggled in to the predictable articles on housekeeping, child-rearing and fashion.<sup>16</sup> Despite being the 'easiest paper to sell', according to some of its supporters, even the first issue of *Woman Today* claimed an order for only 11,000, with 3,500 left unsold on the shelves of Central Books months later. In April 1959 it was agreed to cease monthly publication. Attendance at Advisories fell to 7 or 8 – less than half of those eligible to participate. The issues and proposals for action which it dealt with took on a weary familiarity. A national women's meeting in 1964, for example, had routinely resolved to 'develop the maximum action and campaigning amongst women, on nurseries, maternity services, rents and housing as the basis for extending our influence and recruitment'. But the lack of feminist progress within the Party was revealed by its second resolution which was: 'to develop more consideration and special attention to the recruitment of women by a) the organisation of regular events for this purpose in all Districts and b) the systematic visitation of wives of members and supporters'.<sup>17</sup> This is precisely where matters had stood in 1951.

Some change had nevertheless occurred. More women in Britain were employed in paid work and the expectation was that the trend would continue. A survey conducted in 1957 and discussed by Party women revealed that the number of married women in employment had risen from 2.85 million in 1950 to 3.77 million.<sup>18</sup> Married women were a growing proportion of the female workforce, almost half of it by 1957. Of married women in paid work about half had part-time jobs. Two-thirds of those in part-time work were classified as unskilled or semi-skilled. Women were the only untapped labour reserve in British society but they were confronted everywhere by prejudice,

discrimination, and lack of opportunities. In engineering they represented nearly one-quarter of the workforce by 1962 and over half of them had been employed in the industry between five and twenty-five years, but they did not get the unequivocal support of their male co-workers in the fight for equal pay.<sup>19</sup> Yet Communist women realised that their demands for equal pay, women's rights to work, affordable day nurseries, and equality of training and education opportunities for girls could be won within a capitalist society. While socialism would eventually bring equality:

That does not mean that we sit down and do nothing about conditions until we have got socialism here. On the contrary, we have the possibilities of making advances today by organisation and struggle on the demands for higher wages, shorter hours, equal pay, more comprehensive schools and places for higher education, better social services, adequate technical training for girls, etc.<sup>20</sup>

There was also the fact that of the 7.25 million working women in 1957 only 1.5 million belonged to a trade union. The Communists wanted bigger, stronger unions and had campaigned for equal pay with increasing urgency since the war. But fifty years had elapsed since the demand for equal pay had first been formulated, and the pay gap between men and women was widening.<sup>21</sup> Only 50 of the country's trades councils had women's advisory committees, reflecting the relatively low priority attached to women workers. Communist argued that increasing numbers of women were ruthlessly exploited in paid work and unpaid housework, but Communist men did not set an example in this latter area as some of them later admitted.<sup>22</sup>

By the 1960s, as increasing numbers of women entered the workforce, a new impetus was given to Communist efforts to recruit women into the Party and the trade unions. Literature that reflected the changing situation included the Party's pamphlets *Woman Today: Her Job, Family and Future* (1960) and *Eight Million Pairs of Hands* (1961), by Molly Keith. Articles in the Party press warned readers 'Don't Put Your Daughter in a Dead-End Job'. In a speech to the National Women's Conference of 1962 John Gollan referred to the big increase in women's activity within the trade unions and argued that women's increased entry into industry was the most important new factor of the last decade, and would have far reaching political and social consequences. He acknowledged that the labour movement needed to win a majority of women workers if it was to defeat the Conservatives at the next general election. But he also acknowledged that women were still effectively excluded from politics and urged the Communist Party to lead by example in changing this state of affairs.<sup>23</sup> In 1962 women's wages were said to stand at 81 per cent of those of an unskilled male labourer and in 1963 the TUC itself adopted an Industrial Charter for

Women which included demands for equal pay, opportunities for promotion, apprenticeship schemes for girls, training opportunities for young women, retraining for older women, and special provision for the health, welfare and care of women workers. The Communists annually demanded its implementation and after the election of a Labour Government in 1964 a deputation of Communist women, led by Margaret Hunter, the then Women's Organiser, was quick to lobby George Brown at the new Department of Economic Affairs urging action on equal pay and nursery provision.<sup>24</sup>

### **YOUTH**

By the end of the 1950s the left was persuasively depicted as an ageing, out of touch force, at a time when attitudes towards authority among the young were becoming more critical and even irreverent. The Communist Party was still dominated by the men who had founded the organisation in 1920 – Pollitt, Dutt, Gallacher, Rothstein, Page Arnot, Burns and Campbell – with the assistance of others who had joined in the 1920s and 1930s. The Political Committee was conscious of the Party's lack of success with young people, especially at a time when CND and the New Left were attracting so much interest in this quarter.<sup>25</sup> It could not be admitted that part of the attraction of CND for the young was its anti-authoritarian character and its implicit critique of middle aged men in suits. The bomb was the ultimate symbol of the older generation's moral bankruptcy. But it was the Labour Party which the press and the pundits criticised in 1959 because of its third consecutive general election defeat. Labour did badly among young voters and Labour's candidates in the 1959 election were on average older than their Conservative counterparts – 80 of those elected were aged over 60 compared to just 37 Conservative MPs.<sup>26</sup> Labour had had a long, unsatisfactory history of failed youth organisations and felt compelled to launch a new organisation in 1960 – the Young Socialists – after a five year gap since the dissolution of its predecessor. The Communists had the unbroken continuity of the YCL to boast about, but its nominal membership was just 1,796. Ten years earlier the Young Communists had been 5,000-strong but membership had fallen throughout the decade – steeply so after the crisis of 1956. It was now on the cusp of a new period of membership growth and optimism, but few could have guessed it at the time.

The Party admitted in the early 1950s that it was severely hampered by its notoriety as constructed in Cold War propaganda.<sup>27</sup> But it also took time to recover from self-inflicted wounds such as the 'opportunist error' committed in the immediate post-war years when there was a tendency to 'liquidate the YCL' and ape the methods and purposes of mainstream youth organisations. Such had been the conciliatory 'spirit of Teheran' then informing the CP's perspectives, that the stated aim of the YCL had been watered down to the innocuous goal

of wishing 'to educate and prepare young people to be "citizens of an advanced democracy".<sup>28</sup> A period of neglect of the youth movement followed when the advanced democracy failed to materialise. By 1950 the established policy of the Party was to direct YCL-ers into contact with 'other youth organisations and clubs', the better to form alliances and spread Communist influence. Youth policy amounted to demands for more and better youth clubs and recreational and educational facilities, improved access to apprenticeships and training schemes, and reduction of National Service to one year rather than two.<sup>29</sup> 'Problems of youth', as they were known – juvenile crime, adolescent rebellion, street gangs, sexual promiscuity and the like – were always attributed to a minority who had been 'corrupted by the present circumstances of life', or capitalism.<sup>30</sup> Youth became the subject of innumerable articles, research projects and working parties in the 1950s as politicians, journalists and others of their tribe worried about the condition of the nation's young people. The youth, according to the pundits, were becoming increasingly cheeky, work-shy, apathetic, resentful of National Service, violent, drunken and immoral.<sup>31</sup> While conventional opinion blamed parents, full employment, affluence and the Welfare State; the Communists blamed the Labour Party, whose revisionism bred apathy; free enterprise, which was only interested in exploitation; and the American Dream which had been insinuated into all aspects of youth culture and was expressed 'in clothes, haircuts, bragging, toughness, etc., [and] in the whole attitude to life, in the desire for "getting on", for making easy money, and in the cult of conformity and being non-political'.<sup>32</sup>

The education and training of apprentices was a real issue in the 1950s but not, perhaps, the sort of thing that would inflame the spirit of youthful rebellion – though one would never know it given the number of times the Communists returned to this mantra. It is easy to depict the Communists as out of touch with youth culture – when this became an unmistakable trend in the second half of the 1950s – if not actually antagonistic to its main features, and to a certain extent they were. But they were not alone in this and their incomprehension was not as far reaching as some of their rivals. They were quick to see that a student revolt against the H-bomb in the universities of 1958 was indicative of a much wider unease.<sup>33</sup> They generally resisted arguments which exaggerated the 'generation gap' and the extent of the supposed malaise of youth. They scoffed at those who said it was all the fault of high wages and overly-generous student grants.<sup>34</sup> Their own youth organisation was slowly changing from a mere arm of the Party, enthusiastically denouncing Tito in 1950, for example, to one in which – after 1956 – critical sub-currents had developed associated with the editor of its newspaper *Challenge*, Monty Johnstone.<sup>35</sup> The YCL had taken a more critical line on the Soviet invasion of Hungary and, unlike the Party, had looked forward to the complete abolition of conscription. In

March 1958 a minority of the members of its Executive had welcomed the formation of CND and participated in the first Aldermaston march. This prompted the Party to organise its own march in June 1959, though the theme focused on opposition to the American military bases in Britain and opposition to German rearmament. The decision to support unilateralism in 1960 brought the Party into contact with a dynamic and youthful movement. When a period of YCL membership growth began most Communists took the view that 'it was no accident', as Party jargon would have it, that a spirit of political radicalism had even infected commercial youth culture. Under these circumstances it was easier for the YCL to flirt with the new wave of teenage enthusiasms than ever before. Membership – a high proportion of which had consisted in the 1950s of the children of Party members – topped 5,000 by 1966 and the first ever joint meeting of the CP Executive and YCL National Committee signified that the grown-ups had realised that there was 'something in the air'. The organisation set itself the target of 10,000 activists by 1967, such was the euphoria of the hour.

Although CND had gone into decline by 1962, the wider surge in youthful radicalism was about to begin. It was evident on both sides of the Atlantic. Fast disappearing were the days when YCL members would be satisfied with camp fire socials and compulsory sing-songs in the living room of an obliging branch member. The brief success of the New Left clubs between 1959 and 1961 had taught them something on this score because they achieved a seemingly modern, vaguely French, merger of politics and pleasure. The Communists lagged behind of course, lacking conviction on matters on which some of the New Left believed themselves advanced – in the understanding of popular culture in particular. Youth culture exhibited a radicalism of style and manners, but did it amount to much more than that? The Communists were not easily convinced that it did, nonetheless the Party gradually jettisoned 'principled' objections to youth culture, such as those which purported to see depravity and cultural decay in rock'n'roll, and allowed empirical opportunism to take over.<sup>36</sup> Rock music gradually became acceptable to the YCL as it became an unstoppable feature of British youth culture and as the earlier insistence on folk and skiffle as authentic alternatives to commercial pop began to fade. After 1963 British performers rivalled and even eclipsed their American counterparts and by the time the Beatles triumphantly toured the USA in February 1964 British youth culture had become the international avant-garde in teenage music and fashion. The Communists were not immune from its influences and particular individuals and branches seized the initiative. The Wembley branch of the YCL, for example, set up its own Rhythm and Blues Club in 1964 and membership grew from half a dozen to over 100 – no doubt reflecting the organisational skills and initiative of its core members.<sup>37</sup> Left-wing politics and hedonism were also coming

together in Britain for the first time anyone could remember. The best of the young radicals in folk also crossed over to rock after Bob Dylan – closely associated with ‘protest’ and civil rights in the USA – turned to mainstream popular music.

The YCL found itself in the unaccustomed position of supporting causes that were being taken up by youth – nuclear disarmament, anti-apartheid, opposition to the war in Vietnam, civil rights in Northern Ireland and the USA, Cuba and Third Worldism, against imperialism and racism. It confidently announced its slogan in 1966 as ‘The Trend – Communism’. ‘What are Ban-the-bombers doing? What are Oxfam supporters, anti-racialists, protestors and folksingers doing?’ asked the pamphlet, half a million copies of which were put into circulation. ‘Of course they are doing all kinds of things. But they’ve one thing in common. Most of them are expressing some kind of dissatisfaction with our way of life, with present day Britain’. The answer was socialism. While Britain had become outdated, socialism was equated with the future, progress, science and the march of time. It was about equality, freedom, pluralism, tolerance and participation.<sup>38</sup> Badges commanding the USA to ‘Get Out of Vietnam’ and posters of Che Guevara sold in tens of thousands. The YCL-organised International Youth Festival of 1967, held at a traditional enough venue – the Derbyshire Miners’ Holiday Centre at Skegness – was nevertheless avant-garde in its choice of entertainment by the Kinks and the poet Adrian Mitchell. Gone were the old eastern bloc Youth Festivals that had to be ‘built for’ and the worthy ‘socials’, flattered by having the ‘Accordion Komsomols’ at the top of the bill.<sup>39</sup>

Not all Communists were impressed. While the leadership broadly gave its backing to the YCL – though not without bouts of conflict – some members of the Party observed that only a minority of young people took an interest in any kind of politics and most of those who did belonged to the 100,000-strong Young Conservatives.<sup>40</sup> Youth culture itself in this view was simply an expression of monopoly capitalism – an ephemeral, sometimes vicious and cynical, more often indifferent and apathetic product of a sick society.<sup>41</sup> Though this was a minority view and the Party persuaded itself that objective trends were making young people more critical and socially responsible,<sup>42</sup> Communists continued to produce functionalist explanations of all social and individual disorders and these tended to close down genuine enquiry before it had properly begun.<sup>43</sup> A more open-minded approach would not necessarily have enabled them to recruit more young people, however, though Communists constantly talked as if they themselves believed that success depended on such positive attitudes. The Communists no longer exercised a monopoly of Marxism, or of leftism. The CP had to compete with the New Left, the Trotskyists, feminists, advocates of community politics, the ‘counter-culture’ and much else besides. Compared even to the young who

rallied to some of these, members of the YCL often looked and sounded like young fogeys, miniature career politicians speaking in the approved jargon of Party and trade union officialdom, like the shop steward Kite (played by Peter Sellers) in the Boulting Brothers film *I'm All Right Jack*.

While the Communist Party certainly wanted to exploit the unrest in the universities its analysis of the 'situation in higher education' in June 1967 could have been written ten or even twenty years earlier.<sup>44</sup> The context was described as 'the era of socialist and anti-imperialist revolution' but also as an era 'in which science and advanced technology are completely revolutionising industrial and agricultural production'. The Party continued to stress, as it always had done, the need for wider participation in higher education, the need for more scientists and technicians in an age of rapid technological change, an age in which men and women would have to be continually trained and retrained if unemployment was to be avoided. University education would have to become the norm even though the deficient British economy stood in particular need of university-educated workers and lagged behind other capitalist nations. Yet the expansion of higher education which took place in the 1960s failed to meet the needs of the hour. The Communists had recommended an expansion of student numbers to 175,000 by the mid-60s when it submitted evidence to the Robbins Committee. This was the number actually achieved but it was clear that it was not enough. One internal memorandum analysing higher education provision in 1967 suggests that even Communists could be concerned by the cost of what was required. It wondered whether the Party could realistically 'put forward a demand for a massive expansion on the basis of the present type of provision for university students in this country? Is it economically feasible?'<sup>45</sup>

This note of sober, responsible, reformism was as alien to elements of the youth rebellion and 'student revolt' as the Party's fondness for technological progress and the Soviet Union. The problem was that the rebels and radicals – even those of them who used the language of Marxism – were interested in a range of issues on which the Party had little to teach them. These concerns did not immediately differentiate into the shibboleths of particular groups and momentarily that made it easier to think that Marxism could pull them all together. What the leadership could see by 1968 was a growing constituency of young radicals who could not be satisfied by Labour. Their concerns – feminism, direct action, anti-imperialism, the critique of conventional wisdom – overlapped with those of the Party. But the Party was obviously ill-equipped to speak to the individualism and hedonism of '60s youth and it had little to say that could connect with the cultural explosion of sex and class. The CP was not the organisation to turn to for new thinking on feminism, environmentalism and new forms of democracy. The Party would have to change some more if it was to

attract the constituency of the 'new social movements' and it was not clear that it could do this and retain its existing membership and orientations. The trend in Britain for most young people was in any case not Communism, or indeed any explicit political tendency. It was more a revolt into style and spectacle and evidence that growing numbers of people in Britain could have fun 'under' capitalism. Membership of the YCL peaked at 6,000 in 1967 and fell thereafter. In 1968 Communism was briefly associated with the Prague Spring but also, and more indelibly, with the violent suppression of Dubcek's reform movement, when the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. While the Party sincerely regretted the intervention, and the YCL condemned the invasion outright, both organisations subscribed to the idea that these were authentic socialist countries. Many left activists among the young found this an utterly implausible argument. In France, moreover, the Communist Party stepped forward as an opponent of the disorder and radicalism of the May events, providing Trotskyists with more ammunition to hurl at the 'Stalinist bureaucrats' who stood in the way of genuine revolution. As the 1960s ended only a small minority of Marxists among the students in Britain belonged to the Communist Party or the YCL.

### BROADCASTING

It had been a Communist axiom since Lenin that the power of film was greater than that of the press. The early Cold War years were not conducive to the development of a subtle appreciation of American cinema, as we have observed. Hollywood's dominance was for the Communists synonymous with the monopoly power of capitalists who were notorious for their 'ignorance and vulgarity' and single-minded devotion to profit.<sup>46</sup> Such people headed the big Hollywood studios and had forged 'one of the instruments for the cultural invasion of Europe by the United States of America'. Hollywood had destroyed its rivals, or put them into permanent crisis. It promoted US manufactures and the American way of life, according to the Party. But more than this its role was 'to sap the morale of the working class, to deflect its energies, to confuse it'. One of the devices it adopted was 'the openly reactionary, warmongering propaganda film' such as *I was a Communist*; then there was the 'indirect, reactionary propaganda film' such as *The Third Man* and *The Blue Lamp*; the largest category of film, however, reflected capitalist society as it is or as it might be – the escapist films, the opiates of entertainment were in this category; and finally, there were films with a social conscience which invariably 'provide certain wrong answers and tend to confuse those who see them'.<sup>47</sup>

Crudity was not confined to the Communists. Mainstream opinion by the mid-50s began to worry about the negative impact of television on the minds of children in particular, though no hard evidence was

adduced to support the inference. Communists could be scornful of such 'pernicious propaganda' and take a very relaxed view of what children could watch on television:

Those Mums who scream aloud in mortal anguish when they catch their children looking at a Western because of the cruelty which it sometimes depicts ought to read some of the lesser known plays of Shakespeare, Marlowe and some minor Elizabethan dramatists. I can assure them that they can give a Yankee Horror Comic a good start and still leave it far behind.<sup>48</sup>

This was not what the Communists had been saying in the early 1950s, when everything American had been demonised but by 1959 it could be allowed that 'a Western or an adventurous film often fulfils a real need in children who love action and excitement'. The real danger was 'not watching Matt Dillon' but the political corruption of children which television promoted by spreading 'terrible hatreds against the Communists and the inhabitants of the progressive countries'.

The Revolution was still puritanical, however, still Robespierre rather than Danton. As the 1960s opened the Party submitted evidence to the Committee on Broadcasting and found itself in broad agreement with much of what was subsequently published in the Pilkington Report of June 1962. The points of agreement are much more interesting than the inevitable differences. The Report predictably dismissed out of hand the Communist argument that broadcasting was run by the ruling class through the state machine. The Broadcasting Committee was also entirely unsympathetic to the idea that Communists and Communism had been subjected to a one-sided propaganda offensive through the medium of television. It also showed no interest when the Communists insisted that the news bulletins of the BBC and ITN showed 'partiality in the treatment of current affairs'. Where the Communists and the Committee found themselves in agreement was in their criticism of commercial interests in television. The *Financial Times* was so alarmed that it named Professor Richard Hoggart, one of the better known members of the Committee, as an anti-capitalist who despised mass entertainment as 'anti-life'. What the *Financial Times* abhorred the Communists welcomed, finding much of the report 'of real value, particularly its harsh and unremitting criticism of big business in commercial television'. This had promoted the 'debauching and corrupting' of 'the morals of youth', in the words of *Marxism Today*, all in the name of giving the public what it wants:

Even the poor little fig-leaf of respectability is torn away by the Report which uses such words as 'arrogant', 'presumptuous' and 'patronising' to describe those who talk in such terms; who presume to know what the public wants and give it to them in the shape of violence, sex, brutality,

sordidness, sadism and cheap give-away shows. By so doing, says the Report, commercial television is actually 'depriving the people of what they want', and it goes on to quote approvingly 'Those who say they give the public what it wants, begin by underestimating public taste, and end by debauching it'.<sup>49</sup>

The moguls of ITV 'had taken the bit between their teeth, descending almost to the lowest depths in their eagerness to "give the people what it wanted"', according to the Communists, but they also argued that 'much of commercial television became too crude, too brash, too much a simulacrum of American society to please the more subtle members of the ruling class' who now wanted to rein it in. The Report, then, did not simply reflect the suburban values of Professor Hoggart and his co-thinkers, in the estimation of *Marxism Today*. But nor was it simply the argument of a worried ruling class. The Communists were pleased to announce that Pilkington had 'endorsed and underlined [the Party's] charges of brutality and sadism ... its exposure of capitalism' and its 'stricture that the commercial interests were lowering our cultural standards'.<sup>50</sup> They agreed with Pilkington that society was being 'moulded' by television, which exercised a 'profound' influence upon it, mostly, it would seem, for the worst. It was an argument that soon became the preserve of the Right, with all references to the poisonous effects of capitalism removed from view. An old supporter of Frank Buchman's Moral Rearmament crusade against Communism, Mary Whitehouse, launched a Clean Up TV Campaign in 1964. Renamed the National Viewers' and Listeners' Association (NVLA) it soon had 165,000 paid-up members dedicated to rooting out sex and violence in television. It was a step in the formation of a mostly right-wing 'moral majority' and though its anti-Communist dimension was of little interest even to the members of the NVLA, the Left was soon put on the defensive and by the end of the decade was actually associated with the defence of the 'permissive society'.

## SCIENCE

For some years now the perception that Britain was 'in real and imminent danger of being left far behind' in science and technology had grown stronger. The lack of educational, technical and vocational training opportunities and facilities for young people of both sexes was regarded as one of its most serious signs.<sup>51</sup> As we saw in chapter seven, the argument that the growth of the Soviet economy and its technological advances were the fruit of socialist planning grew stronger in the late 1950s. The argument that Marxism was the theory that gave science its opportunity – advanced with verve by J. D. Bernal, J. B. S. Haldane and others in the 1930s – lived on in this form and for many years yet Soviet economic strengths were presumed by many people to derive from the system's socialist features.<sup>52</sup> But while the world depression

of the 1930s had served to reinforce the argument that science must be frustrated by capitalism and that, by contrast, 'science, modernity and communism were the same thing', capitalism itself was expanding in the 1950s and it was no longer easy to doubt its thirst for scientific advance and its readiness to pay for it. Meanwhile the Communist Party's scientific credentials had been exposed as fraudulent by the Lysenko affair in 1948. Thereafter it lost scientists rather than recruited them – a trend which the events of 1956 confirmed.

J. D. Bernal persisted throughout this period as the Party's most prominent scientist. We have seen that from 1950 he was closely involved in its peace campaigns. He sat on the national committee of Science for Peace, established in January 1952, which did much to publicise the dangers of nuclear radiation. He was active in the Soviet-sponsored World Federation of Scientific Workers and the Communist-dominated World Peace Council. It was Bernal who brought together scientists of international repute in May 1952 in order to force governments to pay attention to the dangers of nuclear warfare. The Pugwash Conference on Science and World Affairs of 1956 was directly related to these efforts. In 1953 he received the Stalin Peace Prize, the reward, in might seem, for his years of unwavering deference to the Soviet state. Yet Bernal's Science for Peace committee had repudiated the ideological subordination of science in its Statement of Principles in 1952 which described science as 'a world-wide republic of the mind' evincing a 'permanently internal character'.<sup>53</sup> After the damage inflicted on Soviet science by the Lysenko affair, this was something the Russians were happy to embrace, once Stalin's death put Lysenko's principal sponsor safely out of the way. It was now possible for Bernal's *Science in History* (1956) to become 'a key document in the drive towards liberalisation within the Soviet scientific community': 'the essence of Bernal's argument was that science had become an ideologically neutral force of production and, as such, it now possessed an internal logic whose writings were best understood by scientists'.<sup>54</sup> Socialism was simply the best system for harnessing science to productive ends. It was an argument Bernal stood for in a ginger group of scientists advising leading Labour politicians in the 1950s – including Gaitskell, James Callaghan, Harold Wilson, Richard Crossman and Alf Robens. As Werskey points out Bernal's influence in this group was mediated through the participation of men he had already won over such as P. M. S. Blackett, C. P. Snow, and Ritchie Calder, as well as through his direct efforts. The modernisation of the Labour Party, and its embrace of the 'white-hot technological revolution' under Wilson's leadership, was of course not simply due to the work of a ginger group. But more than one observer noticed the similarities between Labour's science policy and the one adopted in the 1940s by the Association of Scientific Workers whose President was J. D. Bernal.<sup>55</sup>

The vitality of science and the dangers represented by its misuse or

neglect were especially vivid in an age coming to terms with the scientific-industrial dimensions of Nazi criminality, the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, future nuclear wars, the problem of automation, and the marvels of *Sputnik* and the space race. Communist scientists were among those who strove to 'bring home to voters and to candidates' in the general election of 1955 'the facts of what atomic warfare means'. Party propaganda stressed that 'the policy of the great "deterrent" [was] the suicidal policy of declining imperialism'.<sup>56</sup> But it also insisted that disarmament, the banning of atomic weapons and a system of international inspection was already possible. There was also the mundane but persistent issue of Britain's economic problems and the tendency to think of the relative decline of its economy as if it meant, or threatened to become, an absolute decline in living standards. In this gloomy context the shortages of scientists, technicians, and science teachers could be linked in 1963 to the inefficiencies of the market economy, the failures of government and the need for more public ownership and real planning.<sup>57</sup> The Communists were also determined to exploit the perception that the Soviet economy and society were striding forward at an accelerating rate. This is why the 1968 edition of the *British Road to Socialism* began with the claim that:

We live in an age of great scientific and technological advance. Never before in history have there been such opportunities to lighten work and enrich life, abolish poverty and squalor, wipe out disease.

But in Britain, as in other capitalist countries, a deep-seated crisis of the whole economic, political and social system affects adversely every aspect of life ...

It has never been so clear that capitalism is an outdated system, unable to use the vast scientific advances to benefit the people. The new techniques and discoveries which could in the right hands end insecurity and poverty for all time, are misused to increase private profits and to prepare evermore devastating wars.

### THE DAILY WORKER

We have seen that it was the *British Road to Socialism* which first forced the Party to think about the middle classes, something its leaders had previously found distasteful as well as unnecessary. In the autumn of 1954 the Executive established a 'Commission on the Middle Classes' in order to 'elaborate that section of the *British Road* dealing with the various sections of the people apart from the industrial working class'. In the event the exercise was confined to the professions and 'the collation of such basic facts as their numbers, organisations, grievances, and conditions of employment, together with such trends as affected these properties'.<sup>58</sup> The constant stream of political and social commentary which insisted that society was rapidly changing, however, forced Party members to consider the argument

that Britain was becoming more bourgeois and more conservative, as the service and public sector workforce grew and the industrial working class shrank.

This was the context in which it was decided in 1965 to relaunch the Party's newspaper. The *Daily Worker* was finally wound up and replaced by the *Morning Star* on 25 April 1966. Sybil Thorndike performed the opening ceremony. The decision to change the name was taken without referring the matter to the Party congress and without a full discussion setting out its rationale. Gollan explained this procedure as an expedient that was adopted to avoid 'springing' the issue on an ill-prepared congress. The paper's Management Committee had initiated proceedings by voting for the change of name and the Executive, with one dissenter, had agreed at the beginning of January 1966, leaving too little time, or so it was argued, before the next congress. Dutt, who favoured the change of name, took a different line and reminded Allen Hutt, who opposed it, that the *British Road to Socialism* 'which might have reasonably been considered to merit a full prior discussion and special Congress, was simply adopted by the EC in 1951'.<sup>59</sup> He seemed to be saying why demand democracy now when you were perfectly happy to do without it then? In fact the branches were asked to discuss the proposal after the Executive declared its support and made known its arguments for a new beginning. Extra space in the new 6-page paper, it was said, would make more coverage available for 'the activities of the Labour, trade union and progressive movement, and for the campaigns of the Communist Party and developments in France, Italy, and the Socialist countries and the countries struggling for national liberation'. The order is perhaps instructive. Gollan also argued that there would be better treatment of 'broad social problems, of leisure activities, entertainment and culture. More features of special interest to women and young people would be possible, as well as an improvement in the general appeal of the paper to these sections'.<sup>60</sup>

No secret was made of the fact that the elimination of the *Daily Worker* was designed to keep the Party in step with fundamental social changes. Women and young people were identified as dynamic 'sections' of society. Cultural issues were becoming more important to people. More than ever before the Party leadership favoured durable alliances. Broad lefts and anti-monopoly alliances were the only way forward and there was a need to broaden the paper's appeal. Jimmy Reid was one of those who believed that there was a 'strong political case for a change of name based on the *British Road to Socialism*'.<sup>61</sup> Other correspondents in the debate also reasoned that the change of name was required to exploit the 'left political movement' that had developed in industry – meaning the growth of shop steward power. Dutt argued that there were many people who did not recognise themselves as workers whom the Party nevertheless had to reach.<sup>62</sup> Those against the change complained that the paper currently appealed to a

'fraction of politically conscious workers' and the aim should be to increase that fraction rather than search for support in new sections of society. This argument appealed to John Berger as well as to Sid French.<sup>63</sup> James Cameron, the war correspondent, who was *en route* 'to hospital for a while to get Viet Nam out of [his] system' found enough time to write to Hutt to tell him that the proposed change was an 'imbecility'. Do they want 'the *Daily Professional Man*'? he asked rhetorically.<sup>64</sup> The sneer was obviously aimed at the prevailing consensus to the effect that the days of working class numerical dominance were over. In fact the People's Press Printing Society shareholders voted 228 to 126 to recommend the name *Morning Star* for the new paper. Hutt claimed that about a dozen members of the editorial staff including himself were opposed to the change, even though circulation had fallen after the price of the *Daily Worker* had been raised from 3d to 4d in 1965. It had then stood at 60,000, according to George Matthews, but needed at least another 8,000 readers 'to balance the books'. It was this extra 8,000 that the relaunched paper was going for, according to Gollan.<sup>65</sup>

But it was 'the political case' for the change of name which was emphasised and finally won the day. Since 1957 the Party programme had referred to those 'other sections' closely 'bound up' with the industrial workers. The paragraph in question was too brief and imprecise to convey much conviction, but the passage of time had invested it with new significance. Gollan stated in 1966:

We must bear in mind that 46 per cent of the labour force in Britain consists of non-manual workers of various categories. As in other advanced capitalist countries, this proportion is increasing. Some 2,000,000 persons (in 1959) were in small businesses (excluding farming) bringing in less than £1,000 a year. Many of these people pass in and out of employment and self-employment in activities such as tailoring, building, and engineering sub-contracting.<sup>66</sup>

The new paper would help to build the 'anti-monopoly alliance' by drawing in these people and using the extra space afforded by the six-page format to highlight 'a wider range of interests' and broad social problems, as well as leisure activities, entertainment and culture. The campaigns of the Communists of Italy and France, the successes of the socialist countries and the struggles of the colonial world would also receive more attention according to the Gollan conspectus.

Looking towards France and Italy the Communists had every reason to feel confident. As they surveyed the state of Britain in 1968 there was also more rather than less reason to think that the Party's strategy since 1951 was beginning to bear fruit. The social structure and occupational structure of Britain had both changed, but not in ways which prejudiced the left's prospects. Militant trade unionism was

stronger than ever. The voices of restraint were notably weaker. Communists occupied important positions of leadership at both national and rank and file levels. So did non-Communist left-wingers, who shared many of the Party's priorities. The left was beginning to embrace an alternative programme. It was strong in both the private and public sectors, among blue-collar and white-collar workers. An enlarged constituency of workers and citizens had a personal stake in the defence and extension of the national health and social services, the nationalised industries and the various supports which the state supplied to ailing companies, industries and regions. Expectations of continuous improvement, nurtured by the politicians, were in the process of being flattened. The Labour left was in revolt against the policies of the Wilson Government at home and abroad. The balance of power at Labour's annual conference could no longer support the authority of the parliamentary leadership. The perception of British economic decline – which the Party had propagandised about throughout the 1950s – was growing stronger. Young left-wing political activists were more evident than at any time since the war. Remarkably they seemed interested in Marxism and took up causes which brought them into collision with social democracy, such as the Vietnam war.

## NOTES

1. A. J. Davies, *To Build a New Jerusalem: the labour movement from the 1880s to the 1990s*, Michael Joseph, London 1992.
2. See N. Rafeek, 'Against All the Odds: Women in the Communist Party in Scotland, 1920-1991, an oral history', PhD. University of Strathclyde, 1998, p82.
3. 'Women and the Fight for Peace', CP/CENT/WOM/1/1.
4. Rafeek, p114, reporting on delegates to the bi-annual congress of the Scottish District, observes that by 1957 the majority of the women classified as housewives were in paid work.
5. T. Rust, 'Women and the General Election', *World News and Views*, 15 April 1950, p179.
6. T. Rust, 'National Conference of Communist Women', *World News and Views*, 17 February 1951, p79.
7. M. Clifford, 'Bringing Women into Action', *World News and Views*, 23 May 1953, p235.
8. M. Mandel, 'The National Assembly of Women', *World News*, 21 February 1953 and 23 May 1953, p235.
9. R. Brunt and C. Rowan (eds.), *Feminism, Culture and Politics*, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1982, p97.
10. *World News and Views*, 22 March 1952 and 22 April 1953.
11. N. Jeffries, 'Women in Class Society', *Communist Review*, April 1951, pp108-112.
12. Brunt and Rowan, pp99-100, and 'Women in Industry', *World News*, 7 February 1953.
13. E. Ludmer, 'Forty-six women spread their wings', *World News*, 17 May 1958, in which the reader is told that 'this was the Women's Day, when the

- rest of the family must take over the chores and let Mum spread her wings a bit'. Yet it is also clear that women were left to get on with 'women's issues' by many of the men in the Party. See 'Women's place in the struggle', *World News*, 25 October 1958, p633.
14. B. Hill, 'The emancipation of women and the Women's Movement', *Marxist Quarterly*, 3, 1, 1956, pp40-57.
  15. See the minutes for the meeting of 22 September 1955 in CP/CENT/WOM/3/4.
  16. T. Rust, 'The Dreams and Glamour Market', *World News*, 26 October 1957, pp684-5; further critiques of the commercial women's press can be found in CP/CENT/WOM/1/1.
  17. National women's meeting 29 February-1 March 1964, CP/CENT/WOM/4/2.
  18. Dr. Viola Klein, 'A Summary on "Working Wives"', 10 February 1960, CP/CENT/WOM/1/1.
  19. A. McLean, 'Women in Engineering', *Labour Monthly*, September 1962, pp410-12.
  20. Klein, 'Summary'.
  21. *World News*, 29 November 1958, pp688-9.
  22. *World News*, 17 May 1958, p319; and M. McEwen, *Greening of a Red*, pp160-61.
  23. J. Gollan, 'Socialism means most to women', *World News*, 1 December 1962.
  24. *Daily Worker*, 12 January 1965, p3.
  25. 'Party and Youth', May 1959, CP/CENT/PC/18/13.
  26. C. A. R. Crosland, *Can Labour Win?*, London, Fabian Society, 1960, p21. See L. Black, 'The Political Culture of the Left', p142.
  27. Youth Advisory Committee, 'The Youth Movement', *Communist Review*, August 1953, p251.
  28. *Ibid*, p252.
  29. See for example, 'YCL Congress and Youth Problems', *Communist Review*, December 1952, pp371-8.
  30. T. Madden, 'The British Youth Movement', *Communist Review*, November 1953, pp329-335.
  31. See for example, 'Young people aren't like this', *World News*, 11 February 1956, p95.
  32. P. Allen, 'Youth Under the Microscope', *Labour Monthly*, February 1956, pp71-6.
  33. J. Moss, 'Young people are on the move', *World News*, 22 March 1958, pp181-2.
  34. 'Young people in the news', and 'Students under fire', *World News*, respectively 5 April 1958, p221 and 3 May 1958, p281.
  35. On this see M. M. Waite, 'Young People and Formal Political Activity: A Case Study of Communist Politics in Britain 1920-1991', MPhil. Dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1992, pp125-6 and pp300-307.
  36. Earlier denunciations of rock'n'roll include B. Turner, 'People are beginning to need Jazz', *Daily Worker*, 14 January 1956 and Eric Hobsbawm (aka Francis Newton), 'Rock 'n' Roll', *New Statesman*, 22 September 1956.
  37. Waite, 'Young People', p129.

38. *The Trend – Communism*, 11 July 1966, CP/CENT/STAT/2/3/.
39. I am grateful to Mike Waite for finding this nugget. See his 'The Young Communist League and Youth Culture', *Socialist History*, 6, autumn 1994, pp3-16.
40. When the YCL announced a meeting to discuss the legalisation of cannabis its organizer Pete Carter was hauled before John Gollan to explain himself. See F. Beckett, *Enemy Within: The rise and fall of the British Communist Party*, John Murray, London, pp159-60.
41. D. Milligan, 'British Youth – Progressive, Reactionary or Indifferent?', *Marxism Today*, May 1966, pp154-5.
42. B. Davis, 'British Youth', *Marxism Today*, March 1966, pp76-81.
43. Thus drug taking was, according to Les Reed, 'An Injection of Capital', *Challenge*, February 1972.
44. Stan Murrell, 'The situation in higher education', 5 June 1967, internal paper.
45. Ibid.
46. P. Sutton, 'The Cinema and the Fight for Peace', *Communist Review*, September 1951, p282.
47. Ibid, pp286-7.
48. F. I. H., 'It is political corruption of children that matters', *World News*, 3 January 1959.
49. H. Fagan, 'The Pilkington Report', *Marxism Today*, 6, 8, August 1962, p230.
50. Ibid, p232.
51. 'Apprenticeship Policy', September 1962, CP/CENT/WOM/1/1.
52. See G. Werskey, *The Visible College: A Collective Biography of British Scientists and Socialists of the 1930s*, Allen Lane, London 1978, p250.
53. Werskey, *Visible College*, pp307-8.
54. Ibid, p319.
55. Werskey (p320) refers to N. Vig, *Science and Technology in British Politics*, London, 1968. See also J. Callaghan, 'The Unfinished Revolution', *Contemporary British History*, 15, 3, autumn 2001.
56. *Science Bulletin*, No2, May 1955, p1.
57. 'Communist Policy for Science', 1 October 1963, CP/CENT/CTTEE/01/04.
58. CP/CENT/CULT/1/3.
59. Dutt to Hutt, 12 April 1966, CP/IND/HUTT/02/07.
60. J. Gollan, 'A New Name for the 6-Page Daily Worker', CP/CENT/STAT/2/3/.
61. *Daily Worker*, 14 February 1966.
62. *Daily Worker*, 7 February 1966 and 26 January 1966.
63. John Berger, Ann Berger and Mike Rentz appeared as 'Mike Berger' in the *Daily Worker*, 18 February 1966.
64. James Cameron to Hutt, 4 February 1966, CP/IND/HUTT/02/07.
65. Gollan, 'A New Name'.
66. Ibid.

## 10. Change in the Party

The events of 1956 left a number of permanent legacies which altered the universe of British Communism.<sup>1</sup> Khruschev's speech forever changed the way some members of the Party would view its history and that of the Comintern and of the Soviet Union too. It exposed some of the lies and violence in which the British Party leaders were seen to have been complicit and it wrecked the idea that the Russian Party had exercised a faultless international leadership. The myth of the Communist monolith had taken a battering and more was to follow. Within the Party there were now activists in favour of a more critical attitude towards the Soviet Union and there would have been even more of them had the Party responded differently in 1956. As it was, well into the 1960s Nina Ponamarova's hats remained the only instance anyone could think of involving public criticism by the Party of an action taken by the Soviet Union.<sup>2</sup> The more critically minded Party members were unable to make any serious observations about the socialist countries in any of the Party's journals until 1968.<sup>3</sup> There was, as one of the critics pointed out, 'a totally un-Marxist refusal to allow structural analysis of the bureaucratic system which had produced Stalinism and which ... still remained in state, party and economy despite the ending of Stalin's arbitrary terror.'<sup>4</sup> Instead the Party adopted the optimistic and, it has to be said, fashionable view in the late 1950s and early 1960s that Soviet economic and technological progress would act as a solvent of all the remaining problems of the socialist bloc. No doubt the Party's secret financial dependence on the Soviet Union helped to inhibit criticism of the Russians, but there was more to it than money. The deepest foundations of the Communist identity – its history, purpose, and myths – were centred on the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet socialism. It could not easily criticise or discard this complex legacy.

The Party's most significant reference points, however, continued to change all around it. It was clear that the east European parties had developed legitimate national viewpoints and that the Russian repression of these viewpoints had failed to extinguish them. Significant differences between Yugoslavia and Soviet Russia persisted and once more Tito's government became a target for 'anti-revisionists' in 1957 and after. China added other differences in the years that followed, so

did Cuba and Vietnam. In the West, Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communists – 250,000 of whom left the Party because of '1956' – had openly questioned the idea that 'the cult of personality' was sufficient to explain Stalin's crimes. Though their generally pro-Soviet stance persisted through the 1950s and into the next decade, many Western Communist Parties were no longer unthinkingly reliable supporters of the Soviet Union's policies. They endeavoured to find their own roads to socialism and many of them had to come to terms with parliamentary democracy. The British Party itself accepted in 1957 that party pluralism was a necessary feature of socialist democracy, and one that extended to parties hostile to socialism. This programmatic commitment would stimulate other heretical thoughts in the future. Meanwhile in Eastern Europe ruling Communist Parties had to grapple with the problem of how to make their systems work, and a certain degree of experimentation in economic policy was found necessary in countries such as Hungary as they sought to manage both local and generic problems of bureaucratic, one-party, collectivism. The year 1956 also marks the beginning of the Sino-Soviet dispute, at first cautious and subterranean, increasingly open and intransigent after 1959. The two biggest socialist countries had actually clashed on numerous economic, political and military issues which the Chinese in particular clothed in the language of doctrinal dispute. While Togliatti talked of the necessity of 'polycentrism' in world communism, the Chinese Party talked of the 'principle of equality between nations'. The idea that the CPSU was the leading Party which all the others should bow before was openly questioned. Other divisions fed on the main faultlines as the Sino-Soviet split encouraged centrifugal forces in world Communism. The Albanian Party, for example, had its own domestic reasons to keep the campaign against Yugoslavia alive and did so in open defiance of Khruschev.

China's absorption of Tibet after 1950, particularly after the repression of the rebellions of March 1959, also led to frontier clashes with India, whose government supported the Dalai Lama. Sino-Soviet relations, already soured by numerous points of conflict, were not helped by the fact that Russia initially adopted a pose of neutrality. In 1960 Mao openly attacked the policy of 'peaceful coexistence'. That autumn a meeting in Moscow of the 81 Communist Parties allowed the Chinese and Russian parties to air their many differences behind closed doors. Albania's alignment with China and Russia's inability to convince many of the Asian Parties to take the Soviet side was exposed before the world's Communist leaders. The leaders of the British Party were additionally kept informed of both sides of the dispute by means of letters from each of the Parties, delivered from their respective embassies.<sup>5</sup> By 1961 the Chinese Party was encouraging 'Maoist' factions in other Communist Parties (the British Party was only slightly affected<sup>6</sup>) and the Russians openly denounced the Albanian Party at the 22nd Congress of the CPSU – where new revelations about Stalin's crimes

were heard – just before breaking off diplomatic relations with Albania. Attacking Albania and Yugoslavia had become the cryptic device for conducting the row between Russia and China in public. When open warfare between India and China broke out in October 1962 the Russians did not waver from the pro-Indian policy which Khruschev had pursued since the mid-50s. The Communist Party of India inevitably split into pro-Moscow and 'Maoist' parties under these strains in the autumn of 1962. Most of the Asian Parties sided with China rather than Russia but on both sides of the divide there were further divisions rather than the unquestioning unity of the past.

Another set of pressures making for change in the Communist Party had been in operation since the Popular Front turn of 1935. Most of the British Party's membership had been recruited since then and had had no experience of the insurrectionary phases of Communist history. Party work increasingly focused on wage militancy, peace campaigns, and elections for offices within the trade unions and within the state. We have shown clear evidence of the ways in which the strategy of the *British Road* – involving parliamentary as well as extra-parliamentary politics – was taken increasingly seriously in the course of the 1950s. One indication of the attention given to reformist opposition is the growing concern to submit evidence to official enquiries. In the 1960s detailed reports were compiled on such issues as the future of higher education, reform of secondary education, the future of broadcasting, on how to pay for local government, reform of the press, the nation's health, trade union reconstruction, defence policy, political television and broadcasting time, on pensions, a national policy on science, an integrated transport system, on 'Homes for the People', Commonwealth immigration, race relations, the Franks Commission on Oxford University, the Royal Commission on Local Government (1966), the future of fundamental research in Great Britain (1966), civil liberties, a national energy policy, equal pay, and the national future of Scotland and Wales.<sup>7</sup> The British Party also ran long-standing campaigns which the Sino-Soviet dispute cut across, such as the peace campaign. We have seen some of the irritation which Chinese denunciations of the doctrine of peaceful coexistence caused to the leading members of the British Peace Committee. The British Communists nevertheless maintained a discreet silence about the Sino-Soviet conflict, as best as they could, and when they did finally adopt a public position in 1963 they tried to take an independent view. R. Palme Dutt, leading apologist for the Soviet Union within the CPGB, was unusual among the leadership in questioning China's socialist credentials and even he deferred judgement until 1967, by which time he had retired from his Party positions.<sup>8</sup> Dutt nevertheless spoke for a large section of the membership when he coupled criticisms of China to a declaration of faith in the onward march of Soviet socialism.<sup>9</sup> Nor did he raise any eyebrows when he contrasted Soviet economic successes with the 'disastrous economic situation' in Britain.

The Executive's first public declaration on the Sino-Soviet split on 12 January 1963 and its resolution on the subject on 14 September 1963 were pleas for unity, based upon the common ideology of the Communist Parties. These statements also rejected the Chinese rationale for the dispute on such matters as 'war and peace, peaceful coexistence, nuclear war, forms of transition to socialism, revisionism and dogmatism'. The September resolution 'expressed extreme concern' and appealed 'for an end to the public polemic' and for 'bilateral talks' between the contending sides as a preparation for an international conference of Communist Parties: 'to promote unity on the basis of the strict observance of the unanimously agreed principles of the November 1960 World Communist Conference'. The latter was a reference to the compromise resolution which tried to paper over the real differences between China and the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> Gollan and Matthews visited Moscow and Beijing in 1963 in a bid to advance the cause of reconciliation along these lines. By May 1964, by which time attempts to bring about a preparatory committee for a world conference had foundered on Chinese objections, the British Party issued another statement expressing concern about the factionalism promoted by the Chinese Communists abroad; but they also rejected any idea that the Chinese Party should be 'excommunicated' at a specially convened international conference (as Khruschev had demanded behind the scenes). The Executive's statement reiterated the argument that: 'Each Party is sovereign and responsible for its own policy and its own affairs. This is the position best corresponding to the diverse political conditions confronting the Parties'.<sup>11</sup> All sides now subscribed to this position.

Many influences served to reinforce this perception of what we might call the necessity of independence. One important example was the Party's gradual acceptance of the need for independence of mind and pluralism of thought in intellectual and cultural work during the years after 1963 – something the Russians occasionally encouraged. Once accepted, this principle could not be confined to, say, fine art, the novel or literary criticism. It had to affect Marxism too – and we saw that it did in so far as the Party opened its doors to non-Party Marxists for specific events such as the various study weekends organised by the Cultural Committee. But Khruschev's abrupt demotion in 1964 was the occasion of the first criticism of the Russians by leaders of the British Party when Gollan raised objections about the manner of his departure. In 1966 the Italian, French and Spanish Communists openly criticised the Soviet repression against the writers Daniel and Sinyafsky. The British Communists followed suit and pointed to the way these writers had been hounded by the Soviet press and then tried under conditions which assumed their guilt.<sup>12</sup> It was the first time any of them had openly criticised such repression, although earlier in the year the British Party had also announced its concern that Soviet Jews were having difficulty in obtaining the matzos to celebrate the Passover and that an anti-

semitic publication – ‘the disgraceful Kichko book’ – was in circulation in Russia.<sup>13</sup> Togliatti had criticised the lack of political and cultural freedom in Russia in his ‘Yalta memorial’, which he composed shortly before his death in 1964. It was not well known, but it is evidence at least that foreign Communists were troubled by some of the facts about the Soviet Union. 1964 was also the year when the Italian Party first adumbrated the ‘historic compromise’, in search of a ‘third way’ between social democracy and the ‘people’s democracies’.<sup>14</sup> For some time Antonio Gramsci’s writings had been growing in importance in the politics of the PCI at the expense of the monopoly ordinarily exercised by Soviet-approved ‘Marxism-Leninism’, as the PCI searched for a rationale for its engagement with Italian parliamentary democracy. Soon the Communists everywhere in Western Europe would have to contend with Gramsci and the various New Left Marxisms influenced by existentialism, structuralism, Maoism, guerillaism and Trotskyism.

Despite these changes there is no sense in which the Party collectively faced up to them. It was possible to belong to the Party after 1956 and take different views of the meaning of the events of that year and the same is true of the developments in international Communism which I have just sketched out. At the same time a plurality of views on these issues was not tolerated in print and not encouraged in debate. The official position never challenged the ‘leading role of the Soviet Union’, even though the Party made statements about the independence of the Communist Parties. Similarly the old doctrines, though sometimes disposed of on Soviet authority – as in the case of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ before our period begins – were never subjected to a formal critique, even when they were clearly redundant, as in the case of soviet democracy. Most of the old doctrinal baggage continued to coexist with the Party’s declared commitment to a parliamentary reformism which could even envisage party pluralism ‘under socialism’. Those who took this strategy seriously could invest it with significantly different meanings from those held by members who were lukewarm about it, as became apparent in the 1970s. Others regarded everything, or nearly everything, to do with electoral politics as a waste of time. In a sense whatever the Party did was likely to be seen as ‘wrong’. It gained nothing from electoral contests except the embarrassment of publicly reminding everyone of its political impotence but it had long since ceded ‘revolutionary’ politics to the Trotskyists. The Party’s fudging of doctrinal issues enabled a serious reformist dynamic to develop alongside Leninist and Stalinist politics so that it was neither one thing nor the other. Vanguardism, democratic centralism, and the conspiratorial, sectarian and authoritarian attitudes and behaviour associated with them survived alongside a genuine, sometimes creative, commitment to issues such as women’s equality, educational reform, legislative action against racism, and the host of matters on which the Party submitted evidence to official enquiries. It is clear enough that some Party

members were almost entirely preoccupied by aspects of the organisation's work and that within these specialisms, such as trade union work, the wider politics of the 'vanguard' could be almost forgotten.

The Communists remained convinced of several broad perspectives in the years up to 1968. First, that the balance of world forces had swung decisively in favour of the 'progressive forces'. Soviet economic growth and scientific advances featured in this estimate but so too did the 'general crisis of capitalism' and the notion that 'the nature of the current epoch is the transition of the world from capitalism to socialism'. Second, they consistently maintained that British economic problems derived from the crisis of British imperialism. The burden of playing the 'world role' was one of the main reasons why, in the Communist view, 'plans for housing, health, and educational development have been repeatedly frustrated by economy drives'.<sup>15</sup> A number of policy prescriptions were repeatedly stressed. Britain had to withdraw from NATO and expel the American military bases. It had to withdraw its forces from all colonial entanglements and dispense with the East of Suez policy. Britain also had to abandon the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons. These measures would drastically reduce the defence bill and the balance of payments burden and deal a blow to the cold war against socialism. The Party also opposed Britain's intended membership of the Common Market on the grounds that this too was 'above all the logical outcome of the cold war', a 'bloc of western imperialist states' threatening to permanently divide Europe and designed to be pitted against 'socialist eastern Europe'. But it also stressed the more prosaic objections to Britain's membership, 'above all' the 'end of British sovereignty', which would be transferred to 'bureaucratic commissions ... with powers to give directives overriding Parliament'. This process would lead 'rapidly to a federal unification of West European imperialism' under West German leadership. The 'associate' status of the former French colonies testified to the Common Market's character as 'the new imperialist weapon against the Afro-Asian peoples'.

The Communists stood totally opposed to any form of wage restraint and any legislative interference with free collective bargaining. They also denounced 'the General Council's participation in the National Economic Development Council' and all other manifestations of its willingness to assist in the 'management of capitalism' and hold back the wages movement. Communist strategy continued to focus on changing the balance of power within the Labour Party by winning the affiliated trade unions to their policies. Labour's 1960 Scarborough conference registered enough evidence of progress in this direction to be hailed as 'the most important battle on policy and leadership in the modern history of the Labour movement'.<sup>16</sup> Because 'the main foundations of the Labour Party' remained in the unions, an 'essential contradiction' between this base and its 'petty bourgeois' leadership was there to be exploited. Thus, while 'some spokesmen on the left tended to see in the

great trade unions the impregnable bulwark of the right-wing leadership, and denounced the block vote', the Communist Party: 'consistently presented the opposite viewpoint. It emphasised that the class basis of the trade unions would bring them into inevitable and increasing conflict with the petty bourgeois leadership and thus constituted the decisive driving force for new political advance in the Labour movement'.<sup>17</sup> Scarborough, with its left majorities for unilateral nuclear disarmament, defence of Clause Four and assertion of the sovereignty of the Labour conference, was seen as a 'vindication' of this analysis. Nevertheless it was 'still only the first stages' in the construction of a 'militant alliance' and subsequent reversals were anticipated as a consequence of 'the unorganised and consequently ineffective left' which was the only left the Labour Party possessed. Further steps were said to entail growth of the CP, an end to all the bans and proscriptions impeding organised Marxists within the unions and the Labour Party, the extension of 'progressive' leadership in the unions, the forging of a common programme, and measures to ensure that Labour MPs 'carry out the progressive policies adopted by the democratic decisions' of the mass party.<sup>18</sup> The developing rebelliousness of Labour's annual conference, together with growing evidence of militancy at the TUC congress in the late 1960s and the promotion of left-wing trade union leadership in some of the bigger unions, were noted with approval as the decade unfolded.

The Party was prepared for 'a sustained attempt ... to drive a wedge between the unions and the Labour Party'. In 1963 it considered 'The Future of Trade Unions' at its 28th congress. The expected assault on the unions was forecast to take a variety of forms. Further measures of wage restraint combined with speed-up and automation would produce rising unemployment. Meanwhile the right-wing union leaders would be enmeshed in various corporatist projects designed to divide the national leadership from the shop stewards. The unions would also be hobbled by legislation.<sup>19</sup> For their part the Communists would encourage the unions in the most strategically favoured positions to seek to win for themselves 'the maximum possible wage, salary and other concessions from the employers'. This would stimulate other unions to do likewise. The unions were also enjoined to expand their demands into the area of 'fringe benefits', such as better medical and health and safety provisions, improved sick benefit schemes, extended holidays, stronger pension schemes and retraining programmes. They needed to win the right of 'prior comprehensive negotiations' before automation or any other new industrial technique could be implemented. At the same time the strong unions were expected to demonstrate their solidarity with the low paid and the less favourably situated workers such as women. More powerful unions had to be constructed, complete collective bargaining was still a long way off and the existing federations and confederations of workers had to be strengthened as a step towards amalgamation. Any advances towards amalgamation – and several were

registered, such as those in shipbuilding, printing and building – had to be compatible with a strengthening of democratic control to prevent bureaucratisation setting in.<sup>20</sup> Strong workshop organisation – shop steward committees, joint shop steward committees and combine committees – was 'absolutely necessary'. But any tendency to 'go it alone' had to be resisted in favour of a more complete immersion of the militants in union affairs, precisely so that the 'right-wing bureaucrats' would be unable 'to restrict or undermine their influence'. Fighting unions were required, not paper tigers. 'Right-wing feebleness in the wages movement' was identified as a factor in the decline of recruitment among the manual workers' unions. Apathy and atrophy in the unions was to be combated by measures of democratisation – from periodic election of all full-time officials, to insistence on the sovereignty of conference, and the abandonment of all malpractices.

An embryonic 'alternative programme' was elaborated by the Party with which to build the left-wing alliance in the Labour movement. It amounted to the demand for nationalisation of the 'biggest monopolies', with engineering, shipbuilding, building and building materials, chemicals and textiles, docks, banks, big insurance companies and urban land featuring in the list. Compensation would be 'drastically reduced' and the managing boards would consist of 'workers and technicians' rather than company directors. An integrated fuel policy, with greater reliance on coal and nuclear power, testified to the absence of any real environmental awareness in the Party, as did its demand for the land to be 'fully used' for agricultural production. The Communists were committed to economic growth, rising living standards, bigger and better social services, a shorter working week, massive construction of houses (400,000 per year), the abolition of all health service charges, and the introduction of far-reaching educational reforms – from the abolition of the 11-plus examination and private education to the raising of the school-leaving age and a 'revolution' in higher education. The latter, entailing new universities and technical colleges, was needed (in 1963) so that half a million scientists and technicians could be trained by 1970.

Within a year of its formation, the long-awaited Labour Government, headed by Harold Wilson, who had made his reputation promising such a scientific and technological revolution, was declared a total failure. Wilson was found guilty of trying to maintain Britain's world role in finance and power politics, to the detriment of economic growth and social reform in Britain. The chronic balance of payments problem was to be corrected by domestic deflation rather than through a change in political and economic priorities.<sup>21</sup> 'This policy is bringing the government into increasing conflict with the industrial workers and professional sections', the Party declared in November 1965: 'Even the pledges of the leadership to renounce the so-called British nuclear deterrent have been broken, and the Government now talks of Britain's nuclear role and keeps V-bombers for possible use "East of Suez".

Since a return of Conservative government would constitute a 'disaster' for the Labour movement, according to the Party, a new immediate programme was required to unite the left. But it would not be enough. Far-reaching changes were also needed to strengthen the left in the unions and a key part of this process was the 'further development of friendly relations between Communists and Socialists'. The trade unions remained 'decisive for any real change in the labour movement as a whole' and because of 'the grip of the right wing the position can only be changed by winning the main trade unions for progress'. Without a stronger Communist Party, it was realised, all of this was mere pie-in-the-sky. The Party had grown slightly between 1963 and 1964 but the following year, when the goal was 50,000 members, membership actually fell from 34,281 to 33,734 and its level of activity, according to the leadership, did not meet the needs of the hour.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless as the Government moved 'increasingly into conflict with growing numbers of workers and the organised labour movement', as Gordon McLennan put it at the 30th Party congress in 1967, the Communists claimed that they had made a contribution 'to the leadership of the mass movement' and to the formulation of 'an alternative policy for the left'. General evidence was provided by the events at the 99th TUC that September when, McLennan argued, 'on every major issue the platform either had to go with the tide of feeling of Congress, or face defeat in opposing it'. The upshot was condemnation of the Government's economic record, demands for the repeal of the Prices and Incomes Act, opposition to selectivity in the social services and demands for British dissociation from American policy in Vietnam. Communists, furthermore, had played a conspicuous role in the militant action of railwaymen, miners, teachers, dockers and building trade workers, as had been 'widely acknowledged' by a hostile press.<sup>23</sup> Gollan singled out Jack Henry, Lou Lewis, Cyril Morton, Dave Bowman, Arthur Harper, Dick Etheridge, Jack Dash, and Johnny Tocher for special praise, though there were 'dozens of others' who had led the recent waves of strikes.<sup>24</sup> Some signs of progress were also recorded in the Labour Party in the conference decisions on Vietnam, Greece and military expenditure. It was necessary to press this forward to change Government policy in a left direction. The great need now was to turn sectional struggles in the direction of the big social and defence issues by mobilising 'the total organised power and strength of the labour movement' around the existing alternative policy that would, if implemented, 'make inroads into the power and privilege of monopoly capitalism'.

The Communists had always insisted, as McLennan reminded them in 1967, that people in struggle, while developing the necessary class consciousness, 'do not spontaneously draw correct political conclusions from their experiences'. This was why the gradual shrinkage of the Party to 32,562 members by the end of 1967 was a major problem, though steps had been taken to create 30 new factory branches since

June 1966 and over 500 Communist candidates had stood in the local authority elections the following May. Gollan dismissed the argument, put by the Surrey District, that these two prongs of strategy were incompatible by pointing to 'the biggest [industrial] actions for twenty years, with Communists and the Communist Party playing an honourable role of leadership'. The big question, Gollan pointed out, was whether the anger and discontent could be made to express itself in a struggle to win an alternative policy. But another big question, which no one mentioned, was why Party membership continued to decline when there was so much industrial militancy and even a marked degree of political radicalism. The Party congress heard Jimmy Reid, a notable industrial militant himself, commend the new draft of the *British Road to Socialism*, with its central idea of a 'broad alliance of the British people' brought under the leadership of the left. But for all the programme's elaborate detail, Reid could not disguise the fact that the old demand for Communist affiliation to the Labour Party was a non-starter and the political leadership envisaged by the programme was nowhere to be seen. The future of the left alliance was yet to be 'determined in the course of struggle'. Of course, Reid acknowledged, 'we ... want to see the circumstances maturing which would make possible in this country a single united party of the working class based on Marxism'. But this was a long way distant and the first stage remained the old 'square one' of 'breaking the right wing control of the Labour Party'. Harold Wilson and Ray Gunther had accused the Communists of 'plotting a winter of discontent', which Gollan preferred to call the 'struggle of the labour movement'. There was no plot, but there was no doubt either that the Communists pinned their hopes on the recent 'explosion of industrial unrest' which, as David Bowman told the 30th congress, was 'only a forerunner of what is to come'.<sup>25</sup>

For all the doctrinal and political ambiguities and contradictions in its make-up, there is no doubt that the Party had moved in the direction of a post-Leninist reformism in the years since 1951, as its Trotskyist rivals pointed out. A loosening of its ties to the Soviet Union had also occurred. By 1965 the men who had dominated the life of the organisation for the previous forty years were either dead – like Pollitt and Gallacher – or retired from their leadership positions like Dutt. Generational change had not exactly swept through the organisation, however, even though hostile commentators could see that Gollan had 'confounded all his critics' by helping to rescue the Party from the trough he found it in when Pollitt retired.<sup>26</sup> But it was a wilful exaggeration to say that under Gollan's stewardship 'every aspect of the party's work has taken on a new vitality and is conducted with greater subtlety than before'. Trade union work was only just beginning to find a consistently 'broad left' character when our period closes and had yet found no answer to the 'missing generation' problem in terms of recruits to the Party. The Party's factory branches – 'the highest and most important

unit of Communist organisation' according to Gollan – were declining precipitately in numbers and vitality. Contemporary observers often missed these weaknesses. To them the Party's industrial apparatus seemed 'as strong as ever' at the end of the 1960s and in some respects its power to 'damage the economy' seemed to be 'greater than ever'.<sup>27</sup> This was actually a testimony to the hard work of previous decades, which had seen Communists rise to positions of prominence at national and local level in many unions. The roots, however, were weak, though the tide of wage militancy obscured this fact. Change aplenty existed outside the Party in the 1960s and quite a lot of it seemed to have potential from the Party's viewpoint. But the Communists initiated very little of it and were unsuccessful in replenishing their ranks with those who were interested in a Left-of-Labour politics. The British Communists found membership renewal even more difficult than ideological renewal but these were interconnected problems common to the history of other small Communist Parties in Western Europe. The 'new social movements', as they came to be known, were not yet represented in the Party and their relationship with Marxism-Leninism was deeply problematical.<sup>28</sup>

When Alexander Dubcek replaced Anton Novotny as leader of the Czechoslovak Communist Party on 6 January 1968 it was an event which merited little comment in the *Morning Star* – the paper had not even reported the demonstrations of discontent in Czechoslovakia during 1967. But when *Rude Pravo*, the official paper of the Czech Party, began publishing criticisms of the prevailing system, it began to take notice. According to the account of Reuben Falber, the Action Programme of the Czech Party, published in April, was received with enthusiasm by most British Communists precisely because it promised a thorough reform of the bureaucratic, centralised, single-party state and the introduction of the rule of law – which suggests that most British Communists were only too aware of the shortcomings of actually existing socialism in all these respects. 'I cannot recall any voices being raised in the Party calling the Action Programme "a departure from Marxism-Leninism"', writes Falber, even though opponents later emerged (as Falber expected they would) – once the Soviet Union acted. But this time all members of the Political Committee 'fully supported the changes taking place in Czechoslovakia', even though *Pravda* began to publish complaints of increasing 'anti-Sovietism' in that country.<sup>29</sup> Concern was such that Gollan met with Waldeck Rochet, leader of the French Communists, and Giancarlo Pajetta, head of the Italian Party's International Department, travelling to Paris and Rome in order to do so. Both were deeply pessimistic about the coming Soviet response, having spoken directly to Leonid Brezhnev and Mikhail Suslov in Moscow. The Russians turned down their suggestions for an international conference of Communist Parties and called a meeting of the Warsaw Pact instead. It was while this meeting was in session that the Executive of the British Party declared its solidarity with the Czech

Party on the weekend of 13-14 July. Shortly afterwards Dubcek wrote to the EC inviting it to send a fraternal delegate to the 14th Congress of the Czech Party in September. Meanwhile a press release from the CPGB on 18 July reiterated the principle 'that each Communist Party and each Socialist country is sovereign, and makes its own decisions concerning changes in its country without external interference or intervention'.<sup>30</sup> It also referred to the possibility of an international conference 'next week', apparently suggested by the PCF, and declared its 'solidarity' with the Czechs.

When the Soviet Politbureau met with the Presidium of the Czech Party at the railway town of Cierna and agreed to call a conference of the Warsaw Pact parties in Bratislava, the Political Committee in London reiterated its support for the Czech reforms and its belief in the principles of 'voluntary and mutual co-operation', 'respect for national sovereignty and the autonomy of each Party', the 'principles of non-interference by Parties in the internal affairs of one another', and variation in the national 'paths to socialism and the particular forms and institutions of socialism'.<sup>31</sup> Alongside these statements the PC saw fit to warn of the threats posed by imperialism and West German imperialism in particular which was 'not only a menace to the socialist countries but to all peoples in Europe'. A further press release on 8 August welcomed the results of the bilateral talks between the Czechs and Russians because they vindicated 'the principles of equality, respect for national sovereignty and national independence, territorial integrity and fraternal mutual assistance and solidarity', while allowing the Czech Party to continue its 'policy of extending socialist democracy'. But on 19 August *Pravda* resumed its campaign against the 'anti-socialist' forces in Prague. The day afterwards Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops invaded the country. On 21 August the Political Committee of the British Party said 'we deplore the entry of troops ... into Czechoslovakia'. It asserted that 'in our view, military intervention is completely unjustified'. An emergency meeting of the Executive three days later 'deeply' deplored 'the military intervention' and the word 'intervention', rather than invasion, was used again on the 28 August when the Political Committee welcomed the apparent 'agreement' which the abducted Czech leaders – Dubcek, Cernik and Spacek – had been forced to sign in Moscow, even though, according to Falber, 'we knew the reality – the [Russian] troops were there to accomplish what Bilak and his fellow [Czech Party] conspirators had failed to do – put an end to the reforms of the Action Programme'.<sup>32</sup>

The Communist Parties of the world divided over the Soviet action. Support for the Russians came from the West German, Israeli, Syrian, Chilean, Cypriot and Portuguese Parties. Castro and Mao wanted it both ways – blaming the Czechs and the Russians at the same time. In Britain 'almost every committee, branch and group was divided'.<sup>33</sup> The EC enjoyed the support of prominent trade unionists such as Will

Paynter, Mick McGahey, Dick Etheridge, Bill Warman, and Max Morris but not that of Abe Moffat and Bert Papworth. Support for the Soviet Union came from all quarters, even from among Jewish Party members. Gollan, Reuben wryly recalls, responded to this surprise by saying: 'I suppose a Jew who stayed in the Party after the 1956 revelations will put up with almost anything the Soviet Union does' – a remark suggesting, if true, Gollan's own bad faith.<sup>34</sup> Palme Dutt's support for the Russians was more predictable, as was his use of *Labour Monthly* to promote what was tantamount to a factional view in the October issue. It nevertheless drew support from Dave Bowman, future President of the National Union of Railwaymen, the novelist James Aldridge, Brian Bunting of the South African CP, E.S. Sachs, Mikki Doyle, editor of the *Morning Star*'s women's page, and Gordon Norris, a leading activist in the Seamen's Union. The EC stood fast to its belief in the right of each Communist Party to determine its own policy but the note of equivocation was unmistakable in its press statement of 23 September where it urged that:

whatever differences there may be within the international communist movement as regards the events in Czechoslovakia, there is an over-riding common interest and common need to achieve the maximum unity of all Communist Parties to check the aggressive designs of imperialism, assist the national liberation movements, and defend peace, democracy and socialism.

This was the position of the pro-Soviet elements in the Party, minus the talk of national autonomy. In the event only two of the eighteen district committees voted against the EC position, and a minority of branches supported the Soviet invasion. At district congresses about one-third of the delegates took a pro-invasion position but only three congresses found a majority for this position – those of Surrey, the North East, and Hants and Dorset. A minority of the Executive took the altogether more disturbing view that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was not only wrong but also indicated that the Communist systems suffered from deep-seated distortions. In the YCL a majority took this position.<sup>35</sup> It was the fear hinted at by Palmiro Togliatti twelve years earlier, but many more years would elapse before the Party would confront it collectively.

Change in the Communist Party was thus for the most part uneven, unsystematic and slow. The Party was inevitably affected by the fragmentation of world communism but never led the way and often did what it could to minimise the changes that had taken place. It recognised that Britain and the world were changing but tried to understand the changes in the old way, a way that was by turns dogmatic, piecemeal and pragmatic. It wanted to be associated with 'the unprecedented wave of revolt and unrest sweeping Western Europe', as Gollan put it in May 1968, but also to understand it as the latest 'acute stage ... in the crisis of imperialism'.<sup>36</sup> It saw that 'super monopolies spill over national

boundaries ... increasingly dominate governments and the mass media ... and increasingly undermine the democratic process' – what would be called 'globalisation' twenty years later. It also saw that across Western Europe the employers wanted to contain wages and retrench welfare systems. As the Communists put it:

the employing class, the Tory Party and their organisations and Press have been conducting a campaign of slander and vilification against the trade unions, and have been demanding all manner of sanctions and penalties against them, particularly against shop stewards and those on strike, especially in unofficial strikes.

The Donovan Report, said the Party, was too subtle for this, but had found 'a straitjacket' nonetheless and one that was much more dangerous than the one proposed by the Tories. The unions would be further integrated into a variety of 'state-sponsored bodies' ministering to the needs of monopoly capitalism, instead of being subjected to a thorough democratisation as the Party had recommended to the Commission. 'A further attack on working class living standards and democratic rights in the interests of big business' was expected and the Party was as ready as it could be to oppose it tooth and nail.<sup>37</sup>

It was reasonable to assume, on Leninist logic, that wage militancy would politicise large numbers of trade unionists as they engaged in conflicts with the employers, the police and the government of the day. The Communists had also been confident that bigger, stronger, more democratic unions would channel rank and file militancy more effectively. One expected benefit of this strategy was a radicalisation of the unions affiliated to the Labour Party. On this basis the Communists expected to promote their own policies – in alliance with the Labour Left – on economic reform, foreign and defence policy, the Common Market and so on. The Communists and the Labour left shared a similar conception of socialism, a similar critique of British defence and foreign policy, and similar ideas on the Common Market and the inadequacies of the 'revisionism' of Labour's parliamentary leadership. The Communist Party's failure to grow is difficult to attribute to an 'incorrect strategy', given that most of these issues converged in the 1970s. Nor could it be said that the Communists lacked energy in the prosecution of the various elements of this strategy. The Party engaged in an impressive range and volume of activities, many of which demonstrated a capacity for originality and political initiative. It was hampered throughout the period, of course, by numerous obstacles. Its strength varied significantly between regions, industries, and trade unions. Its factory branches were in almost continuous decline. The leadership was never satisfied with the level of branch activity and there was evidence, as we have seen, to support its complaints. The membership also undoubtedly contained sectarian elements hostile to the outsiders the

Party was supposed to be trying to reach. There were others whose focus on trade unionism excluded aspects of the Party's politics. The Communists were unable to attract women and youth and even in the trade unions – for all that they may have concentrated on bread-and-butter issues – worries were expressed throughout the 1950s that the Party was failing in its search for the cadre of the next generation.

The ready-made explanation for these problems is the Cold War and the Party's uncritical identification with the Stalin dictatorship. To be a supporter of a foreign power, one that was widely believed to be iniquitous and malevolent, can never be an asset. That much is obvious. The Cold War, paradox though it may now seem, forced Communists to defend their side of the argument. It was more difficult to criticise the Soviet Union, more difficult to find an independent viewpoint when the only real alternative was supposed to be the US-led free West. The Cold War led to a closing of ranks and a siege mentality rather than the conditions that might have hastened ideological change in the Party. There is no doubt that the Communists lost many members and potential recruits by supporting Soviet repression in Hungary and by doing their best to suppress the Khruschev report and the debate that it provoked. An assertion of the Party's independence in 1956 – if that can be imagined for a moment – would also have caused splits and demoralisation. But it is arguable that a more vigorous New Left might have emerged, in which case it may have made a bigger impact on British politics.

There are reasons to be sceptical, however, about whether that much would have changed if this counter-factual scenario had been a reality. The Soviet connection was not purely negative for the Party. What is striking now is the extent to which the Soviet Union continued to be seen in the 1950s and '60s as a huge success. The technological and economic expansion of the first socialist state continued to impress observers. There were Labour socialists, as well as Communists, who believed that this expansion would lead to progressive political and social reforms. It is mistaken to think that the Russian connection was simply a liability – certainly not among British socialists; and it was in this milieu that the Communists hoped to become dominant. The link with Moscow may well have repelled some people from the Party but there were many other reasons why it failed to mount a serious challenge to Labour.

The Communist Party nevertheless continued to organise a significant proportion of the British left throughout the Cold War. It averaged around 30,000 members in the years 1951-68. This represented more than half its peak membership, briefly achieved during the unique circumstances of 1942-3. A more instructive comparison is with its pre-war membership, which was rarely more than half the size of the Party in the years 1951-68. In fact the Communist Party in the period examined here was probably the most successful far left organisation in Britain since the socialist revival of the 1880s. Certainly bigger and more

effective than the Social Democratic Federation or the Independent Labour Party (ILP) after its secession from Labour in 1932, it dwarfs the combined membership of the far left groups of 1900-17 and was bigger than the ILP in the years before the Labour Party was formed. The record since 1880 shows little support for the view that the Communist Party would have been more successful in the 1950s and '60s if only it had pursued a different policy or had not been associated with the Soviet dictatorship. There was no Soviet dictatorship before 1917 but Marxist and socialist groups in Britain failed to obtain much support in over thirty years of trying. Parties to the left of the Labour Party never achieved more than the Communists managed in terms of membership, organisational resources, and effective intervention. Though many improvements to the Communist Party can be imagined it seems unlikely that a party of a different order of magnitude could have been established. The improvements in question were never very likely to be implemented in the Party that actually existed in the 1950s. The whole of its previous history prevented it from effectively addressing the problems which the dissidents of 1956 complained about – such as its vanguardism, dogmatism, democratic centralism, sectarianism, hyper-activism and inability to distance itself from the Soviet Union. Other Communist Parties had the same set of problems. Variations in the national political cultures must be employed to explain why some of them were able to become mass organisations while others, like the British CP, failed to do so.

In the British context it is worth recalling that in the year the CP was formed the socialists of the Labour Party were also a minority – sharing an organisation with a far larger mass of non-socialists. The relatively feeble condition of socialism in Britain was not only true of the groups on Labour's left flank. It was true within the Labour Party as well. More socialists emerged in the unions and the Labour Party in the 1920s, but there was little to encourage them in Britain where most of the working class voted for the Conservative Party, making it the most successful centre-right party in the whole of Europe. Social democratic governments in the inter-war years were a rarity throughout western Europe and achieved very little. Though Labour made strides in local government, the unions lost members from 1920 and were weakened by unemployment. The ethical and Fabian-gradualist versions of socialism which survived in the Labour Party were undermined and marginalised by the economic and political problems of the 1920s and 1930s. All sorts of socialists had reason to project their hopes on to the Soviet Union after it inaugurated the first five-year plan, in the context of the world capitalist crisis of 1929-39. The rise of fascism and the Second World War produced circumstances which enabled the Soviet Union to become genuinely popular. The war also revived organised labour and massively improved Labour's electoral prospects. But it was the sustained economic growth of our period which made it possible for the

party's leaders to continue to talk of socialism and equality. Those sceptical of this Keynesian socialism continued to believe in centralised state planning based on the ownership and control of at least the 'commanding heights' of the economy.

The Soviet Union's experience remained salient and inspiring to many of these people. The Labour left was still a relatively small number of individual activists. The growth of the individual membership, which the war had done much to stimulate, peaked at just over one million in 1952. Most of these members would have been inactive. The Gaitskellite campaigns against Bevanism may have done something to further demobilise and dispirit them after 1952. But the Communists themselves complained that Labour's grassroots only sprang to life during elections in any case.

What seems clear enough is that the individual membership of the Labour Party was a diminishing proportion of the total. If there was one big growth area it was in trade union membership and trade union affiliation to the Labour Party, which grew from 2.5 to 5.6 million in the years 1945-58, and then held steady at this high plateau. Whatever type of socialist organisation had existed to the left of the Labour Party most active socialists would have made the calculation that the Labour Party was the organisation in which they could make the biggest impact on policy. The Communists themselves made this calculation. Though they did everything they could to make an impact in the unions they knew that to really make a difference in this area of work they needed to belong to the Labour Party – albeit with their independent organisation and Marxist ideology intact, a condition that had no prospect of realisation.

## NOTES

1. See A. Westoby, *Communism Since World War II*, E. Mandel, *From Stalinism to Eurocommunism*, New Left Books, London 1978; F. Claudin, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*, New Left Books, London 1978; M. Waller and M. Fennema (eds.), *Communist Parties in Western Europe*, Blackwell Oxford 1988; K. Middlemas, *Power and the Party: Changing Faces of Communism in Western Europe*, André Deutsch, London 1980.
2. Ponamarova was arrested for stealing the hats in London in 1956 and the Russians responded by withdrawing all of their athletes from the White City games.
3. M. Johnstone, '1956 and 1939 – the Legacy', in *The Communist Party and 1956*, CPGB, London 1993, p40.
4. *Ibid.*, p41.
5. R. Falber, *The 1968 Czechoslovak Crisis: Inside the British Communist Party*, London, Socialist History Society, Occasional Papers Series, No.5, nd. p8.
6. A small faction led by Michael McCreery formed the Committee to Defeat Revisionism for Communist Unity in 1963; McCreery published *The Way*

- Forward: a Marxist-Leninist Analysis of the British State, the CPGB and the Tasks for Revolutionaries*, London, Working People's Party of England, nd.
7. Press releases on these issues can be found in the files CP/CENT/STAT/1/10 to CP/CENT/STAT/2/5. Policy statements can be found in the files of the Executive Committee and its sub-committees.
  8. R. Palme Dutt, 'Whither China?' *New Times*, numbers 20-24, May-June 1967.
  9. 'Notes of the Month', *Labour Monthly*, January 1967, pp1-13.
  10. Executive Committee, 'Resolution on the International Communist Movement', 14 September 1963, CP/CENT/STAT/11.
  11. Executive, 'The International Communist Movement', 23 May 1964, CP/CENT/STAT/2/1/.
  12. Executive statement, 'The Trial of the two Soviet writers Sinyavsky and Daniel', 14 February 1966.
  13. Executive press release, 12 January 1966.
  14. G. Amendola, 'Il Socialismo in Occidente', *Rinascita*, 7 November 1964.
  15. 'Britain's Future', political resolution put before the 28th congress of the CPGB, April 1963, pii.
  16. 'Political Resolution', 27th congress of CPGB, 1961, piv.
  17. Ibid, pv.
  18. Ibid, pvi.
  19. 'The Future of Trade Unionism', resolution put to the 28th congress, pvi.
  20. 'Trade Union Problems in 1964', report prepared for the Political Committee, CP/CENT/PC/07/17, p9.
  21. 'Draft Political Resolution', 29th congress of the CPGB, 27-30 November 1965.
  22. Ibid, pxiv.
  23. G. McLennan, speech on 'left unity in action for an alternative policy', 30th congress of CPGB, CP/CENT/CONG/16/01.
  24. J. Gollan, 'Speech on Left Unity', ibid.
  25. 'Incomes Policy', speech introducing the resolution by David Bowman, ibid.
  26. A. Crawley, 'A Red Under Every Bed?', *Encounter*, 21, 1, July 1963, pp50-3.
  27. B. Crozier, 'Britain's Industrial Revolutionaries', *Interplay*, 4, 1, January 1971, pp30-6.
  28. There is more evidence of these groups in the case of the Swedish and Dutch parties. See M. Waller and M. Fennema (eds.), *Communist Parties in Western Europe*, Blackwell, Oxford 1988.
  29. Falber, 1968, pp7-8.
  30. Press statement 'On Events in Connection with Czechoslovakia', 18 July 1968.
  31. 'Statement on Czechoslovakia', PC Press Statement, 26 July 1968.
  32. Falber, 1968, p15.
  33. Ibid, p17.
  34. Ibid, pp18-19.
  35. Thanks to Monty Johnstone for pointing this out to me.
  36. J. Gollan, press statement released 24 May 1968.
  37. 'The Report of the Royal Commission on Trade Unions', 20 June 1968, Press and Publicity Department.

# Biographical Notes

This sample is intended to give a glimpse of the people who made the Communist Party. Fuller and richer sketches of some of them can be found in the remarkable work by Joyce Bellamy and John Saville, the *Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Macmillan, ten volumes so far.

**Abbott, Syd** Lancashire District secretary.

**Aherne, Tom** London railwayman.

**Beauchamp, Kay**(1899-1992) Joined the CP in the early 1920s. Propaganda officer for the London District, Finsbury Borough councillor, worker in the International Department of both the Labour Research Department and the CP. Active in the Movement for Colonial Freedom, member of its London Area Council. Helped produce the first number of the *Daily Worker* on 1 January 1930.

**Bellamy, Joan** Born 1926, joined the Party as a student in 1945. Served as full-time Party worker 1953-63 and 1966-73. Held jobs as West Yorkshire Area Secretary, District Organiser, Leeds Area Secretary and in the International Department.

**Bellamy, Ron** Born 1917, joined CP in 1937. A University teacher at Oxford and Leeds from 1945 to retirement. Secretary of Leeds University staff branch of CP, member of Yorkshire District Committee and the Economics sub-committee of the CP Executive.

**Bennett, Mick** National Organiser, worked on *Morning Star*.

**Bernal, J. D.** Leading scientist, writer and Party member. Bernal was variously a state scientific adviser, presiding officer of the Association of Scientific Workers, a worker for the World Federation of Scientific Workers, an apologist for Lysenkoism, a member of the national committee of Science for Peace, a member of the World Peace Council and a driving force behind the creation of the Pugwash Conference. He was as closely identified with official Communism as any intellectual of his generation.

**Birch, Reg** Engineer and protégé of Wal Hannington at Swift's Scales Co., North London, during the Second World War, where he led a dispute in 1941 which led to the use of Order 1305 and the court appearance of seven shop stewards. Resigned to form the pro-Chinese Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist).

**Bland, Bill** Ilford optician who in 1956 denounced Khruschev's exposure of Stalin and later organised an Albanian Friendship Society.

**Bourne, Harry** Served in the International Brigade and active in the anti-fascist campaigns in Britain in the 1930s. Wounded at the battle of Ebro. Member of the Party Executive for 16 years and District Secretary for the Midlands. Died in 1974.

**Brown, Isobel (1894-1984)** Party full-timer, graduate of the Lenin School (1929) and long stays in Moscow (1924-6). Active in Spanish civil war campaigns. Women's Organiser until Tamara Rust took over in 1942-3. Unpaid full-timer at King Street until 1954.

**Carritt, Gabriel (1908-1999)** Son of an Oxford University professor, educated at the Dragon School, Sedbergh public school and Christ Church, where he was the Adonis-like idol of Auden's set. He was for a time a teacher at Columbia University, New York, where he joined the Communist Party and became involved in the strike of Kentucky miners and recruitment campaigns among black students in the Deep South. Active in anti-Fascist work in Britain, Spain and Germany. Stood as the anti-appeasement candidate in the May 1939 by-election in the Abbey division of Westminster where he secured 4,764 votes (32.6% of the poll). A man of great personal courage. Fought in Burma during the Second World War. Returned to Britain in 1945 to fight the general election and secured 3,000 votes in his old Abbey constituency. Served on Westminster City Council, active in squatters campaigns. Worked full-time for the Party as an organiser and in several capacities with the *Daily Worker*. A schoolmate of John Betjeman, University friend of Richard Crossman, W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender, he lived his last years in poverty and approaching blindness.

**Chapple, Frank** Already a full-time organizer for the YCL before he joined the army in 1942, Chapple rose to prominence within the Communist faction of the ETU in the years 1948-56. In 1956 he encouraged the dissidents after the invasion of Hungary to stay in the Party to reform it from within but he was suspended from active involvement in the ETU Communist group and became one of its most tenacious enemies in the years that followed.

**Clegg, Arthur (1914-1994)** Turned to Marxism as a student at the LSE in the 1930s where he joined Friends of the Chinese People, a cause which was to remain his abiding passion. Indeed he became full-time national organiser for the organisation in 1937, under its new name China Campaign Committee. Jailed in 1940 for pro-Indian independence speech. In 1941 became editor of *World News and Views* (circulation then reaching 100,000) before moving to the *Daily Worker* as Far Eastern adviser in 1947 and then foreign editor, a post he kept until 1957. Left the Party in 1957 over differences about China but remained a Communist.

**Cohen, Eve** London teacher.

**Cohen, Gerry** London District Secretary.

**Collins, Henry** Academic economist, member Economic Committee, resigned in 1956-7, became a Labour Parliamentary candidate in 1959. Secretary of the Society for the Study of Labour History, 1961-64.

**Costello, Mick** Full-timer, originally in Manchester area, served on Political Committee in 1980s.

**Cox, Dora (1904-2000)** Joined the Party in the early 1920s; foundation member of the YCL in 1924. Member of YCL delegation to Soviet Union in 1927 where she remained for the next three years at the Lenin School and a trade union college. In 1930 directed by the Party to work among Lancashire cotton workers. Married Idris Cox, prominent Welsh Party activist. In 1934 led the Welsh section of the national Hunger March (at the head of the Tonypandy contingent) that converged on London. Active in

Spanish solidarity work during the civil war. Active in the miners' wives support groups of South Wales during the 1984-5 coal strike.

**Cox, Idris(1889-1989)** Born in Maesteg, Wales, followed his father into the pit aged 14. Joined the Party in 1923, educated at the Marxist Labour College. Full-time Party worker from 1927 until 1969, editor of the *Daily Worker* in the late 1930s. Secretary of the International Department of the Party in the 1960s.

**Daly, Lawrence** Born 1924, son of a Communist miner, began work at Glencraig pit in Fife where he joined the CP. Branch secretary in 1946, became member of the Scottish Executive and then the National Executive of the NUM. Left the CP in 1956 and established the West Fife Socialist League. Had close connections with dissident CP intellectuals such as E.P. Thompson and John Saville. Member of the *New Left Review* editorial board at its inception.

**Dash, Jack O'Brien(1907-89)** Raised in a poor-law orphanage in London after the untimely death of both parents within a few years of each other. The cause was poverty but given as lung disease. Served in the army and made a living from numerous jobs including professional fighting. Became politically active through the National Unemployed Workers' Movement and reading Upton Sinclair and Robert Tressall. Won the TUC's Tolpuddle Medal in 1937 for persuading a whole building site of workers to join the union. He had joined the CP the previous year, moved to Stepney and was involved in the Cable Street battle against the British Union of Fascists. During the Second World War he worked with the Auxiliary Fire Service and joined the FBU. In 1945 he became a docker in the Port of London and active in the unofficial Port Workers' Committee. Disciplined by the TGWU as one of the six dockers regarded as ringleaders in the blacking of the *Beaver Brae* in support of the Canadian seamen's strike of 1949. Led the agitation when seven dockers were taken for trial in 1951 under Order 1305. Chaired the London Docks Liaison Committee from 1958 and rose to national prominence in the 1960s during the strikes, mostly wildcat, which affected the docks, then going through a painful process of modernisation. Became a shop steward in 1968, which helped to force a rules revision allowing Communists to hold office in the TGWU. Retired in 1970 but remained active in campaigns for better old age pensions and against racism. His coffin was draped with the banner of the shop stewards' committee of the Royal Group of Docks and those assembled sang the 'Internationale'.

**Dean, Frances** Manchester area full-timer, USDAW activist.

**Dobb, Maurice (1900-76)** Already a socialist before entering Cambridge University, where he met J. D. Bernal, Kingsley Martin and Allen Hutt, Dobb wrote for *Plebs* and became a member of J. M. Keynes' Political Economy Club. Joined the Party in 1921 and became a member of the executive of the Labour Research Department in 1924, on which he remained until 1936. From 1924 he also taught at Cambridge University but it was not until 1948 that he was elected to a Fellowship. In 1932 Dobb was publicly scolded by Dutt for suggesting that intellectuals working in the same fields of interest should organise themselves into separate groups within the Party - a practice that was encouraged in later years. By 1939 Dobb was internationally recognised as a leading Marxist economist. In 1946 he published the seminal *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* which provoked a famous debate in the pages of *Science and Society* with

contributions from Paul Sweezy, H. K. Takahasi, Rodney Hilton and Christopher Hill. He also worked with Piero Sraffa on the monumental *Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo* from 1948. He remained a Party member after 1956 but as an internal critic. He wrote many books and articles but also involved himself in all aspects of Party work.

**Dunman, Jack** Treasurer of CPGB, writer on agricultural and cultural issues.  
**Dutt, Rajani Palme (1896-1974)** Founder member and leading theorist of the Party whose career was intertwined with Pollitt's. Stood down from leadership positions in 1965.

**Eddisford, Vic** Manchester Area full-timer, electoral agent, YCL secretary.

**Foulkes, Frank** National organiser of the ETU, elected president of the union in 1945, re-elected in 1950.

**Francis, Henry** Assistant Secretary of the Musicians' Union and pre-war timpanist with London Symphony Orchestra, friend of Paul Robeson.

**Frow, Eddie (1906-97)** Skilled engineer and intellectual based in Salford. Joined the Party in the 1920s leading unemployed workers in a march to Salford Town Hall in 1931 where he was beaten and arrested, subsequently serving a five-month prison sentence in Strangeways. Active in building the Communist base in the Manchester AEU. With his second wife Ruth amassed a private library of working class and Left history which was made available to visitors from all over the world. Local historians themselves the Frows transferred their library to Jubilee House in 1987 under the auspices of Salford Council where it is housed as the Working-Class Movement Library.

**Gadian, Sol** Manchester Area Committee full-timer.

**Gallacher, William (1881-1965)** Engineering worker, active in the temperance movement in 1900s, leader of Clydeside shop stewards during the First World War. Represented shop stewards at the second congress of the Communist International. Founder member of the CP. Served on Central Committee from 1922-63 and on the Political Bureau until 1945. Jailed in 1921 and 1925. MP for West Fife 1935-50. Chairman of the CP 1950-56, President of the Party from 1956 to 1965. Alternate member of the ECCI from 1924, a full member of its Presidium from 1926-35, alternate member of the Presidium 1935 to 1943. In 1963 he resigned as President of the Party and was elected an honorary life member of the Executive. A mile-long funeral cortège, five-thousand strong, followed Gallacher's coffin at his funeral in Paisley and some 20,000 onlookers lined the route.

**Gilbert, Tony** Lifelong campaigner against imperialism and racism. Fought in Spain with the International Brigade. Active in the Movement for Colonial Freedom.

**Gollan, John (1911-77)** Joined the YCL and CP in 1927 moving to London from Glasgow in 1932 to become editor of *Challenge* three years later. Became General Secretary of the YCL in 1935. Secretary of the North East District Committee in 1939 and in 1941 became Secretary of the Scottish District Committee. Assistant Secretary of the Party from 1947, taking over from Pollitt as General Secretary in 1956.

**Green, Horace** Yorkshire District Secretary.

**Green, Nan** worked as a nurse with the International Brigade; Secretary of the International Brigade Association.

**Hannington, Wal (1896-1966)** Toolmaker, joined the BSP in 1915, foundation member of CPGB, one of the founders of the National Unemployed Workers Movement in 1921 and its leader until its demise after WW2.

Central Committee member in 1929 and 1930s, imprisoned 1925, AEU National Organiser 1941-51.

**Haq (nee McKay), Barbara** (1918-98) General secretary of the Movement for Colonial Freedom from 1962-73. Joined the CP during the Second World War through contacts in the Musicians' Union. Worked at the London District Office where she met Islam al Haq whom she married. Moved to Pakistan in 1952 but returned in 1955 (with children Rashida and Rafiq) due to poor health. Active in campaigns against Pakistan's military regime. Left the CP and joined the Labour Party and in 1958 went to work full-time for the MCF. Seconded to act as Secretary of the British Campaign for Peace in Vietnam. After 1973 made her living as secretary to Michael O'Halloran MP.

**Hackett, Ida** Nottingham area activist.

**Hart, Finlay** Scottish CPGB leader.

**Haxell, Frank** Assistant General Secretary of the ETU, elected General Secretary after the death of fellow CP member Walter Stevens in 1954. Haxell joined the Party in 1935 and the ETU in 1929. In 1939 he was banned from holding any office in the union for five years for supporting an unofficial electrician's strike at Chorley. After his reinstatement in 1944 he held several union offices. He was forced to resign from the Communist Party and give up his union position after the 'ballot-rigging' court trial in 1961.

**Heinemann, Margot** (1913-92) Cambridge graduate. Joined the CP in 1934. Worked for the Labour Research Department from 1937 to 1949. Expert on the coal industry, both for the LRD and the MFGB. Edited *Labour Research* until 1942. Author of *Britain's Coal: A Study of the Mining Crisis* (1944), *Wages Front* (1947), *Coal Must Come First* (1948), a novel *The Adventurers* (1960), *Britain in the 1930s* (1971, with Noreen Branson), and numerous academic books on the drama and literature of the seventeenth century. Communist candidate in 1950 general election, member editorial board *The Modern Quarterly*, *Labour Monthly*, and *Marxist Quarterly*. Lecturer, University of London, 1965, Fellow of New Hall, Cambridge 1976-81.

**Hendy, Jack** Member of the ETU and lawyer.

**Higgins, Percy** Active in the Peace campaign.

**Hill, Howard** (1913-80) Joined the YCL in 1934/5, active member of the ETU and Sheffield Trades Council. Prominent in the Mass Trespass movement led by Bernard Rothman of the Manchester CP, which set out to open countryside for walkers with a campaign that began at Kinder Scout on 24 April 1932. Hill published *Freedom to Roam* in 1980, an eloquent testament both to his commitment to the cause and the persistence of the problem the Communists set out to solve in the 1930s. Joined the Labour Party and served as an elected councillor for Brightside in 1938 and did not become an open member of the CP until 1943, from which time he was always a Party full-timer, helping to form the Yorkshire District and working on its secretariat until he retired in 1975. Active in APEX, the clerical workers' union, from 1945 and awarded its Badge of Merit and life membership upon retirement. Severely shaken by the revelations of 1956, disillusioned with Dutt in particular, he nevertheless remained a member of the Party.

**Horne, Harold** Came to the Communist Party via the Hunger Marches and mass demonstrations organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement. Jailed for six months arising from this work. Studied at the Lenin School in Moscow, fought in Spain and organised anti-Fascist activities in Britain. From March 1940 worked at Vauxhall Motors, Luton where

he remained for nearly 32 years, finishing at the Dunstable plant. Member of the Luton No.8 branch of the AEU and of the 'Management Advisory Committee' which he helped to form at Vauxhall during the war, and on which he served for 25 years with ever-increasing majorities. Campaigned for 25 years to obtain full trade union recognition.

**Horner, Arthur (1894-1968)** Born at Merthyr Tydfil, influenced by Keir Hardie and Noah Ablett, one of the authors of *The Miner's Next Step* (1912), a classic of British syndicalism. Foundation member of the CP, part-time member of the Political Bureau by 1923, the year he helped to establish the Miner's Minority Movement in South Wales. Put in charge of the Industrial Department after the arrests of the 12 Communist leaders in 1925. Opposed the sectarianism of 1929 and refused to follow the official line within the unions, for which he was accused of putting trade union reformism before the Party's politics - 'Hornerism', as it was briefly known. General Secretary of the NUM (established 1944) from 1946-59. Elected Miner's Agent in 1933, served as President of the South Wales Miners between 1936 and 1946. Autobiography *Incorrigible Rebel* (MacGibbon and Kee 1960).

**Hutt, Alan** Voluntary worker on *Workers' Weekly* at its launch in February 1923, chief sub and general factotum at *Sunday Worker* (1929), chief sub at *Daily Worker* (1930-32). Worked with Kay Beauchamp in preparing the Cayton Street plant for the *Daily Worker* (1933-35). Restyled *Reynolds News* (1936), joined editorial staff of *Reynolds* and became its Night Editor during the war. From September 1942 assisted William Rust at the *Daily Worker* building the editorial cadre from scratch. Responsible for the paper's styling at its rebirth and again in 1948, a styling that won the paper four prizes in the annual Newspaper Design Award. Member of NUJ, elected to its National Executive in 1946 and in 1948 elected Editor of *The Journalist*. President of NUJ in 1967, author of several books.

**Jackson, Frank** Woodworker, worked with Peter Kerrigan in the Industrial Department; looked after CP library in retirement.

**Jeffrey, Nora** Served on the Political Committee, National Women's Organiser.

**Jones, Claudia (1915-64)** Born Trinidad, raised in New York from the age of 9. Joined CPUSA in 1934, worked on *Daily Worker* from 1936, National Director of YCL from 1941. National Women's Organiser 1947. Arrested on a deportation warrant 1948. December 1955 deported to Britain. Worked with Amy Garvey, wife of Marcus Garvey, and together launched *West Indian Gazette* in 1958. Active in feminist, anti-racist and anti-colonial campaigns. Buried Highgate cemetery, near the grave of Karl Marx.

**Kane, Jock (1907-77)** Started work at West Lothian pit aged 14, blacklisted in 1926 and resettled in Derbyshire, later working for the CP in Sheffield. Active in the campaign against Spencerism and excessive overtime in the Derbyshire pits alongside his brother Mick Kane. In 1937 moved to Armthorpe colliery in Yorkshire and elected branch secretary in 1939, becoming a delegate to the Yorkshire Area Council. Became a member of the Yorkshire Miners' Executive. Joined the NCB as Area Labour Officer for the Doncaster coalfield in 1947 but resigned after three years. Miner at Hatfield Main, near Doncaster and in 1963 elected full-time area agent for Doncaster. Elected Area Financial Secretary in 1966 and from 1969 served on the NUM National Executive.

**Kapp, Yvonne (1903-1999)** German-Jewish freelance journalist, novelist, one-time literary editor of *Vogue* in Paris, translator, researcher and biographer. Joined the Communist Party in 1936 after a visit to the Soviet Union and conversations with Pollitt on the journey back to Britain. Worked with Basque and Jewish refugees until the Home Office dismissed her in 1940. Research Officer for the AEU and Jack Tanner's speech writer during the next decade. Editor and translator (Brecht, Ilya Ehrenburg) for Lawrence and Wishart between 1953 and 1957. Author of the great biography of Eleanor Marx (2 volumes, Lawrence and Wishart, 1972 and 1976).

**Keal, Minna (1909-1999)** Joined the Party in 1939, left it in 1957, as did her son, the talented left-wing historian Raphael Samuel. She helped to get 200 Jewish children out of Nazi Germany. After the war she worked as a secretary at the *Daily Worker* and sang with the Workers' Music Association. Remarkable musician who composed a four-movement symphony in her 70s and became a fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in 1990.

**Kettle, Arnold** Born 1916, taught at Leeds University from 1947-67, writer, Open University lecturer. Joined the CP in 1956, served on its Executive.

**Lauchlan, William**, National Organiser of CPGB.

**Law, Chris (1916-99)** Started work aged 13 but only joined engineering in 1938 and became a member of the AEU Sheffield No.9 Branch. By the time of his retirement he had been an AEU branch official for 40 years and had received the AEU Award of Merit and the Special Award of Merit. Under Law's leadership the AEU No9 Branch became known as the Red Branch, ignoring all the AEU's and TUC's bans and proscriptions and frequently sending delegates to conferences with obvious Communist links. Before it became apparent that the Labour Government would prevent many of the delegates from attending, Law was one of the organisers of the second World Peace Conference in Sheffield in 1950 (the conference took place finally in Warsaw). He led the delegation which met Pablo Picasso and other prominent participants at Sheffield station. But he maintained that the visit of Paul Robeson to Sheffield was the most memorable event in a life that was filled with political and trade union commitments. He was a Communist all his life, a non-believer who respected the religious beliefs of others and whose own knowledge of the Bible was considerable.

**Mahon, John (1901-1975)** London District Secretary, Pollitt's first biographer and the son of John Lincoln Mahon, a colleague and friend of William Morris and Frederick Engels. His first job was in engineering in the East End of London. Joined the CP shortly after its foundation and spent most of the rest of his life as a full-timer, variously in the Minority Movement, as Industrial Organiser, Secretary of the London District Committee and as a member of the Executive and Political Committees. A staunch loyalist and enforcer of the Party line on the Commission for Inner-Party Democracy in 1956.

**Matthews, George** (born 1917) Son of a Bedfordshire farmer, studied agriculture at Reading University. Prospective Labour candidate for Mid-Bedfordshire from 1938 to 1940. Joined CP in late 1930s, left the Labour Party in 1940. Elected to Executive of CP in 1943 and subsequently to the Political Committee. Retired from Executive in 1979. Assistant Secretary of CP 1950-57, editor of *Daily Worker/Morning Star* 1959-74, in charge of the CP Press and Publicity Department 1974-79.

**McCourt, Barney (1893-1961)** Founder and lifelong member of CP. Steelworker

on Clydeside. Lanarkshire County Councillor from early 1930s to 1949.

**MacEwen, Malcolm** Member of the Executive Committee 1941-3, Parliamentary candidate in 1941 and 1950. *Daily Worker* journalist 1944-56, for most of the time as Parliamentary correspondent, but also foreign editor, reporter, feature writer, and war correspondent in Greece. Signatory of the Minority Report of the Commission on Inner-Party Democracy. Author of *The Greening of a Red* (1991).

**McGahey, Mick** Miner from Shotts, Lanarkshire, born 1925, son of a CP founder-member. Joined YCL aged 14. Elected to Scottish Area Executive in 1958. Elected to NUM National Executive in 1966. President of the Scottish Area NUM from 1967, Vice-President of the NUM from 1973.

**Mindel, Mick** (1909-94) A Yiddish-speaking East Ender, Mindel's Lithuanian father was a Bundist who brought socialists from all over the world to the family home, including Emma Goldman and Rosa Luxemburg both of whom Mick remembered meeting. Joined the Party in 1929. By 1938 he was chairman of the United Ladies' Tailors Trade Union, an organisation which printed its rules in Yiddish as well as English. He led it into the National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers and served on its executive but his further rise was blocked because of his politics. His Communist Party membership survived the 1956 revelations.

**Moffat, Abe** (1896-1975) Leader of the Scottish NUM. Started work in the Scottish pits in 1910, served as a volunteer in First World War, became a socialist in 1922 and joined the CP. Served as a local Party organiser, local councillor, Party organiser for Fife, member of the Scottish District Party Committee and member of the CP Executive Committee for 30 years. Delegate to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1937. Became General Secretary of the United Mineworkers of Scotland in 1931, elected to the Scottish Executive of the MFGB in 1940 and served on the National Executive of the union and as President of the Scottish Miners for the 19 years after 1942. Acted as advocate on behalf of the union in disaster inquiries, representing victims and their dependants; eg in the Knockshinnoch disaster of 1950 and the Auchenheich disaster of 1959, when 47 miners were killed. Retired from his NUM positions in September 1961 aged 65. Autobiography, *My Life with the Miners* (Lawrence and Wishart 1965).

**Moffat, Alex** Scottish Miners' leader, nominated in 1960 for the NUM Presidency by the Yorkshire area. President of the South Wales Miners 1961-7, member of the NUM Executive.

**Morris, Max** Headmaster, NUT President and educationalist. Member of the Education Committee of the Party and its Executive Committee.

**Paynter, Will** (1903-84) General Secretary of the NUM 1959-68, following Arthur Horner; joined the Party in 1929 during the campaign to elect Arthur Horner in Rhondda East. Victimised for his beliefs in 1931, he worked full-time for the Party and the National Unemployed Workers' Movement until 1936. Led the Hunger Marches of 1931, 1932 and 1936. Student of the Lenin School Moscow. Underground activist in Nazi Germany, helping the escape of Communists and Socialists. Elected to the rank and file executive of the South Wales Miners' Federation in 1936 and active in the campaign to destroy the scab union at Taff Merthyr. Political Commissar with the International Brigades. Elected agent of the Rhymney Valley in 1939 and president of the South Wales miners in 1951. Prominent

in campaigns against rearmament and colonialism and in the agitation to restore Paul Robeson's civil liberties. Negotiated the National Power Loading Agreement which finally unified the miners' wages system and created a genuinely national union. After retirement in 1968 Paynter remained active in numerous Left causes – Chile Solidarity, Llafur (the Welsh Labour History Society), the International Brigades' Association, the Pensioners' Movement and the CND. Briefly left the Party in the late 1970s because of differences on industrial policy but rejoined. Autobiography, *My Generation* (Allen and Unwin, 1972).

**Piratin, Phil** (1907-1995) Represented Parliamentary constituency of Mile End 1945-50. Youngest of 10 children, born in Stepney. Joined the Party after Mosley's infamous Olympia rally in 1934. Led Stepney rent strikes in 1930s and helped to organise the opposition which blocked Cable Street and prevented Mosley's march into the East End. Elected Communist councillor for Spitalfields in 1937. ARP warden during Second World War, led campaign for deep bomb-proof shelters, member of London district committee secretariat. Became West Middlesex organiser. Author of *Our Flag Stays Red*.

**Pollitt, Harry** (1896-1960) Manchester boilermaker. Moved to London in 1918 and became active in the Russian solidarity movement after the Bolshevik Revolution. Member of Sylvia Pankhurst's Workers' Socialist Federation before becoming a founder member of the CP in 1920. Secretary of the Minority Movement 1924-29, Secretary of the Party 1929-56 and its President from 1956 until his death. See K. Morgan, *Harry Pollitt*, Manchester University Press, 1993.

**Pritt, D. N.** (1887-1972) Educated at Winchester, London University, Germany, Switzerland and Spain, LLB London. Called to the Bar, Middle Temple 1909. MP for North Hammersmith 1935-50; chairman of the Howard League for Penal Reform and of numerous CP-sponsored organisations such as the Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR. Not officially a member of the Party but treated as one by its enemies. Took formal lessons in Marxism from Dutt. Counsel for the defence in several high profile trials involving opponents of British colonialism, such as that of Jomo Kenyatta. Vouched for the legality and justice of the Moscow Trials.

**Ramelson, Bert.** (1910-1994) Born in the Ukraine, the son of a Jewish religious teacher. His older sisters joined the Bolshevik Party but he emigrated to Canada with the rest of his family in 1921. Trained as a barrister, he joined the Communist Party in 1935 and the Canadian International Brigade the following year. During the fighting in Spain he was wounded on two occasions (on the Aragon and Ebro fronts), serving with distinction as an adjutant. He then moved to England in 1939, marrying Marion Jessop, the Leeds CP Secretary. He became a tank commander in the Second World War. Captured by the Germans at Tobruk in 1941, he organised a mass escape of POWs and was returned to England by partisans. After demobilisation he worked full-time for the Party in Leeds, first as a branch secretary, then from 1953 as Yorkshire District Secretary. Here he assisted the Party's work in the NUM, working with such men as Jock Kane and Sam Taylor to build a militant area of the union – 'To change the NUM leadership you first had to change Yorkshire'. In 1966 he became national industrial organiser. After retirement in the late 1970s he became the British representative on *World Marxist Review*. Two years before his death he was

quoted as saying, 'The only thing I'm satisfied with is that the struggle is a reality, and it must return. Some of the Party will survive and return'.

**Rickword, Edgell** (1898-1982) Poet and critic, editor of *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, 1925-27, which helped form the views of F. R. Leavis; two volumes of *Scrutiny*, 1928-32; the *Left Review*, 1936-38; and *Our Time*, 1944-47. He also edited the essays of Christopher Caudwell (1949). His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1976.

**Simon, Brian** Professor of Education, Leicester University, member of Executive Committee and Education Committee, co-editor of education journal, *Forum*. Worked part-time at the Labour Research Department.

**Stanley, Frank** Convenor of shop stewards at EMI, CPGB's London District Secretary, chairman of the Party.

**Taylor, Sammy** Barnsley-born, chairman of the Yorkshire Area Communist Party. In 1959 secured a place as the Yorkshire area's rank and file member on the NUM Executive. Became Yorkshire Compensation Agent in 1964.

**Thornton, Rosa (nee Rust)** (1925-2000) Named after Rosa Luxemburg by her father Bill who was then Secretary of the YCL. From 1928 raised in Moscow. After the break up of her parent's marriage, and their return to Britain, Rosa was left in a Moscow boarding school in 1937 and later lived in a Moscow hotel for political immigrants. When the Luftwaffe bombed Moscow in 1941 she was moved along with a group of German exiles to the Volga German republic near the front. The bureaucracy then deported her to Kazakhstan with hundreds of thousands of Volga Germans. They arrived close to starvation and for the next two years Rosa was put to hard labour in the copper mines. She avoided death only because a letter she wrote to a Moscow friend found its way to Dimitrov who personally signed a pass that got her back to Moscow in the spring of 1943. She then returned to England, worked for Tass until 1951 and married George Thornton, a left-wing historian. Her story is evidence that British Party leaders knew of the terrible sufferings inflicted upon Soviet citizens by the Stalin dictatorship but did and said nothing about it.

**Watters, Frank** Miner from Shotts in Lanarkshire, born 1920. Joined the CP aged 18. Full-time Party organiser up to 1953 on the Scottish coalfield. In October of that year he was moved to Barnsley to build the Party and the Broad Left within the Yorkshire NUM. In 1967 the Party moved Watters to Birmingham to become Secretary of the Birmingham Party so that he could focus his attention on the car industry and the AEUW. Between 1974 and 1979 he was Midlands District Secretary and a member of the Party Executive Committee from 1975-9.

**Weaver, Mick** NUM activist Lancashire coalfield.

**Williamson, John** Scottish origin, emigrated to USA in childhood. Joined CPUSA. Imprisoned following the trial of Communist leaders. Deported to Britain. Essex District Secretary and EC member. Librarian of Marx Memorial Library. Died 1974.

**Wynn, Herbert** Elected permanent official of Derbyshire Miners' Association in 1942 and served as Agent, Area Treasurer and General Secretary. Member of the Labour Party until 1929 when he joined the CP. Left the Communist Party in 1956 and rejoined the Labour Party in 1957.

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